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THE

APRIL 23, 2018

NEW YORKER



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THE NEW YORKER

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APRIL 23, 2018

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PHOTO BOOTH

Pari Dukovic's scenes from Dolce & Gabbana's Alta Moda extravaganza in New York.



LIKES

New Yorker staffers recommend the best of what they're reading, watching, and listening to this week.

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THE MAIL

GUNS IN THE HANDS OF KIDS

There was a strange dissonance between Sharif Hamza's photographs of teen-agers with guns and Dana Goodyear's accompanying article (Portfolio, March 26th). Goodyear mentions gun-related deaths and injuries, but mostly focusses on a "parallel realm, where guns signify . . . safety, discipline, and trust." Hamza's pictures, by contrast, were outright frightening. We can talk about target shooting or trap and skeet, but guns have only one purpose, which is to kill. These armed children, regardless of the occasional smile, look menacing. There is simply no way to take benign photos of armed people.

Looking at the picture of Cheyenne Dalton, a sixteen-year-old from Missouri, whose mother is concerned about self-defense, I could not help thinking of a *New Yorker* cartoon by Matthew Diffie, from 2011, in which a gun salesman says, "O.K., but say that you have up to six hundred intruders per minute."

Peter Hantos

Los Angeles, Calif.

There are plenty of people out beyond the suburbs who are active and conscious gun owners. Many of them are appalled by what has happened with guns—the loss of training, practice, and discipline in gun handling; the ignorance and apathy of gun dealers and police. The people I know are ranchers, farmers, or aficionados. They are not interested in military-type weapons like the AR-15, because they're not accurate, they're noisy, and there's no use for them. Skeet shooting requires well-made, balanced, and accurate shotguns. They are an enthusiasm all their own. Hunters want accuracy and reliability in their long guns. After my friend the late rancher Drummond Hadley (the author of a fine book of cowboy poems) talked to experts at a rifle company about the accuracy of a new .270, they sent him one with a super-accurate barrel that they kept in

reserve. In Drum's ranch house, the rifles up on the wall—lovely old Winchester lever-actions and such—were for history, not for shooting. Valuable, of course, if somebody stole them. But his really good rifles and shotguns were well hidden and locked up. A lot of what's for sale out front in the gun stores is tricked-out trash. I prefer archery.

Gary Snyder

Nevada City, Calif.

The majority of Americans both respect a person's passion for firearms and favor stricter gun laws, in order to prevent guns from being obtained by mentally unstable individuals who kill innocent citizens. The idea that the left wants to take away someone's Second Amendment rights is propaganda from the National Rifle Association. Should semiautomatic weapons designed for purposes of war be banned? As a non-gun-owning person, I say yes. However, each of us deserves the right to enjoy our passions. If children wish to use AR-15s in sanctioned competitions, then I can support that choice, provided that there are strict registration and training requirements. But victims of gun violence deserved to live their lives without being killed as if they were in the midst of war.

Larry Kwiatkowski

Bellingham, Wash.

When I lived in Manhattan, I attended a program sponsored by the N.R.A. called Women On Target. After work, a group of women would assemble in a basement firing range on the West Side to practice responsible gun use and safety. I learned that guns are tools, and that, like all tools, they are designed for a specific purpose. It is disingenuous for the N.R.A. to promote itself as an organization that teaches gun safety, even as it refuses to acknowledge the need for gun reform in order to promote true safety. It was also exploitative for *The New Yorker* to use photographs of kids with guns to sidestep the fractious topic of the epidemic of gun violence. These trained,

adolescent gun users are learning how to use their tools responsibly, and that education is something that should be supported.

K. A. Robinson

Montclair, N.J.

I suppose the goal of Hamza's photos was to humanize gun owners and to show us how "normal" gun ownership is for many people. So what? We already know that not all gun owners are big-bellied, bearded yahoos. We have heard plenty of stories about ladies totting pistols in specially made purses, and about mothers who are gun owners. We certainly don't need reminding that gun owners can be young. An innocent or appealing face does not dispel the reality that guns kill. Hamza's young figures did not convince me that a despicable activity is acceptable—only that appearances can be deceiving. What a waste of ten pages. Even worse, these photos served as an advertisement for more gun ownership.

Laura Inman

Rye, N.Y.

DEFINITIONS OF BEAUTY

I am disappointed by Anthony Lane's glib criticism of my character's appearance in the film "Gemini" (The Current Cinema, April 2nd). To deem unflattering the "big jeans" and "baggy gray top" I wear throughout the film is to suggest a preference for heroines in more tight-fitting clothes. And to even mention my "haircut from hell" is to miss the point of my performance entirely. We need to see female characters be powerful and beautiful in ways that don't rely on outdated representations of women.

Lola Kirke

Los Angeles, Calif.

•
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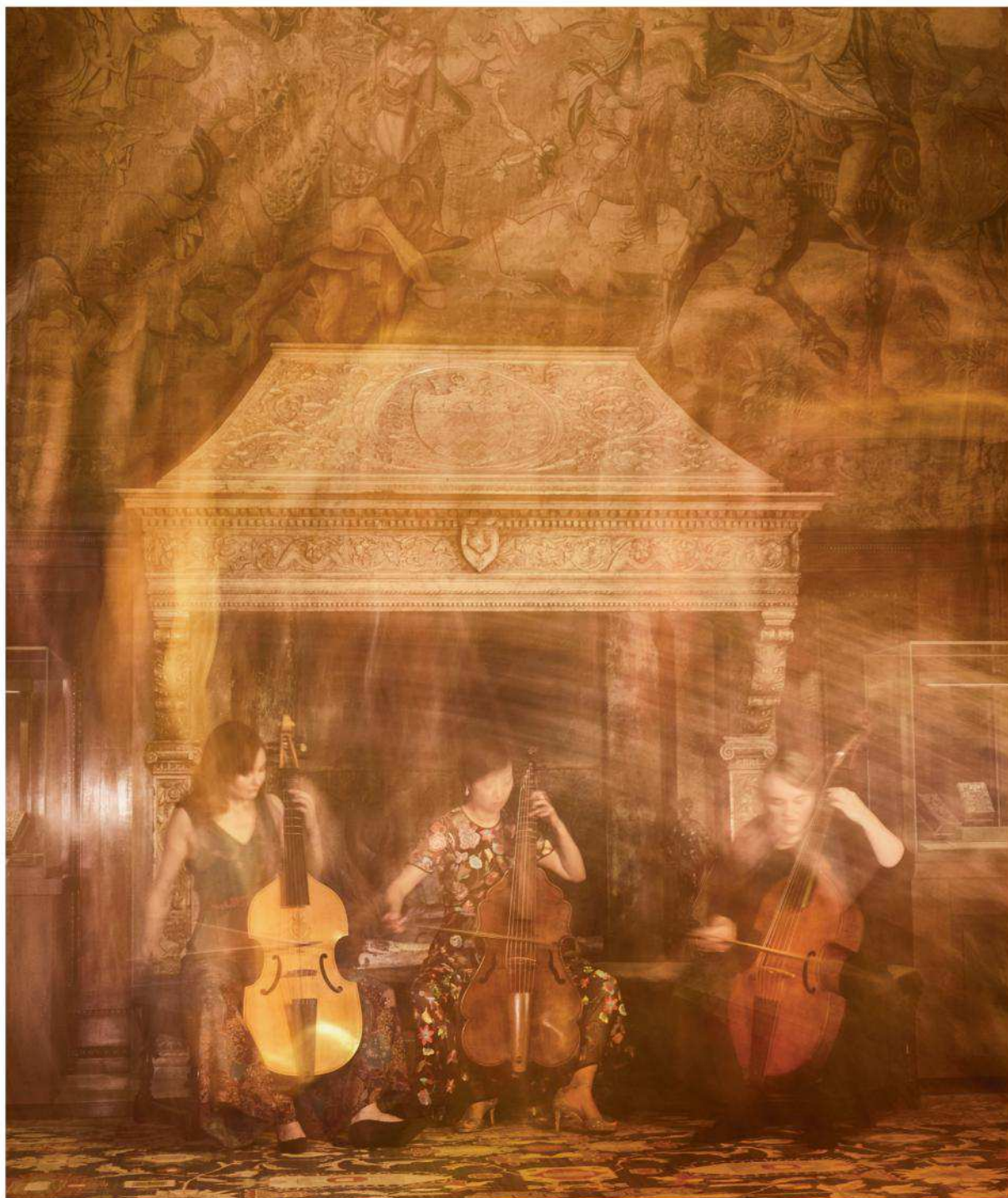
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APRIL 18 – 24, 2018

GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN



Johannes Schenk's twelve viol sonatas, by turns sprightly and solemn, and collectively called "**Le Nymphe di Rheno,**" were a swan song, in 1702, for the now archaic ancestors of the modern violin. Shirley Hunt, Wen Yang, and Sarah Cunningham, of New York Baroque Incorporated (above), bring the instruments back to life with one of the Schenk sonatas. They also perform works by Bach and Couperin, and a fifteenth-century paean to smoking, on April 24 at the Morgan Library, perhaps Manhattan's closest approximation to the nymphs' Rhineland court.

PHOTOGRAPH BY SAMANTHA CASOLARI

CLASSICAL MUSIC

OPERA

Metropolitan Opera

The title role of Puccini's "*Tosca*" is an alluring, larger-than-life diva who delivers one of the most beloved arias in the Italian repertoire, so it was especially flummoxing when Anna Netrebko, one of opera's undeniable superstars, dismissed the idea of ever singing it. That was in 2010; now she is making her role debut as the Roman prima donna in David McVicar's handsome production, which opened earlier this season. Marcelo Álvarez and Michael Volle are her able co-stars; Bertrand de Billy conducts. *April 21 at 8.* • Bartlett Sher's production of Gounod's "*Roméo et Juliette*," revived this week, doesn't exactly lend Shakespeare's great love story new impact, but it brings a satisfying simulacrum of Verona to life. Ailyn Pérez and Bryan Hymel, two artists who sing with passionate intensity, play the lovers. Plácido Domingo conducts. *April 23 at 7:30.* • **Also playing:** At seventy-seven, Domingo continues to defy conventional wisdom—and, seemingly, time itself—as he takes on another Verdi baritone role, his eleventh in nine years, in this season's revival of "*Luisa Miller*," a bucolic tragedy based on Schiller's play "*Love and Intrigue*." The Met flanks him with two superlative artists, Sonya Yoncheva and Piotr Beczala; de Billy. (Luca Salsi replaces Domingo on April 18). *April 18 at 7:30 and April 21 at 12.* • "*Cendrillon*," Massenet's often enchanting version of the Cinderella story, is only now getting its first Met performances. The imaginative director Laurent Pelly works with a first-rate cast, including Joyce DiDonato, Alice Coote, Kathleen Kim, and Stephanie Blythe; de Billy. *April 20 at 8 and April 24 at 7:30.* (Metropolitan Opera House. 212-362-6000.)

Juilliard Opera: "Hippolyte et Aricie"

Ballet is never far from French opera, and for this production of Rameau's elegant *tragédie en musique* the director Stephen Wadsworth and the choreographer Zack Winokur have integrated modern dance into the mythic tale of Phaedra's illicit love for her stepson. Stephen Stubbs conducts the school's period-instrument ensemble, Juilliard415. *April 19 at 7:30 and April 21 at 2.* (Peter Jay Sharp Theatre, Juilliard School. events.juilliard.edu.)

Manhattan School of Music Opera Theatre: "La Cenerentola"

The conservatory follows up its production of Rimsky-Korsakov's moody fairy tale "*The Snow Maiden*" with Rossini's bright and lively telling of Cinderella. Jay Lesenger directs, and Gary Thor Wedow conducts. *April 20 at 7:30, April 21 at 2:30 and 7:30, and April 22 at 2:30.* (Gerald W. Lynch Theatre, John Jay College, 524 W. 59th St. msmny.edu.)

ORCHESTRAS AND CHORUSES

New York Philharmonic

Christopher Eschenbach, who next year will return to his native Germany to conduct the

Konzerthausorchester Berlin, leads an evening of Teutonic masterworks, anchored by Anton Bruckner's Symphony No. 9 in D Minor. Bruckner died before completing the final section, but three powerful movements make up a work of transportive drama. The second half of the program will feature the Austrian pianist Till Fellner in Mozart's elegant Piano Concerto No. 22 in E-Flat Major. *April 19, April 21, and April 24 at 7:30.* (David Geffen Hall. 212-875-5656.)

Ensemble Échappé

This impressive young sinfonietta offers an imposing selection of new and recent works, including the first performance of Jonathan Dawe's "*Astounding Angels*," featuring the clarinetist Vasko Dukovski, and the New York premiere of Michael Hersch's Violin Concerto, with one of the composer's most compelling interpreters, Miranda Cuckson, as the soloist. Works by Phil Taylor and Nina C. Young complete the program. *April 20 at 8.* (St. Peter's Church, 619 Lexington Ave. ensemble-echappe.com.)

MetLiveArts: "TENET"

The refined early-music vocal group joins forces with Metropolis Ensemble, a versatile, eclectic chamber orchestra. The program—a response to the Metropolitan Museum's exhibition "*Visitors to Versailles (1682-1789)*"—sets "*Les Plaisirs de Versailles*," a seventeenth-century divertissement by Charpentier, originally presented in the apartments of King Louis XIV, against world premières of two pieces also inspired by the royal palace: a cello concerto by Timo Andres, featuring Inbal Segev as the soloist, and a piece for period and modern instruments by Caroline Shaw. *April 21 at 7.* (Grace Rainey Rogers Auditorium. metmuseum.org.)

Pacific Symphony

In bringing his admirable Orange County orchestra, plus the Pacific Chorale and a clutch of soloists, to Carnegie Hall under the auspices of Philip Glass's season-long residency, the conductor Carl St. Clair evokes a pillar of that composer's creative journey: his connection to the great Indian sitar master Ravi Shankar. Opening with a portion of "*Passages*," on which Glass and Shankar collaborated, the program includes Shankar's Sitar Concerto No. 3, with his daughter Anoushka Shankar as the soloist, and Glass's "*The Passion of Ramakrishna*," a grandly sweeping 2006 choral work that recounts the saga of the eponymous nineteenth-century Hindu mystic. *April 21 at 8.* (212-247-7800.)

RECITALS

Mark Padmore

In 1840, when he was twenty-nine, Robert Schumann embarked on his *Liederjahr*. By the time it was over, he had written more than a hundred songs, including his famous "*Dichterliebe*" and the first "*Liederkreis*," both set to lyrics by Heine. Six Brahms settings of works by the same poet round out a performance by Padmore, one of the genre's hallowed interpreters, and his long-time accompanist, Paul Lewis. *April 19 at 7:30.* (Alice Tully Hall. 212-875-5788.)

Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center: Danbi Um

The Korean violinist and member of the CMS young-artist program gives an intimate recital in the Rose Studio, accompanied by Orion Weiss. The unfashionably late-Romantic program, covering music by Korngold, Strauss, and the great virtuoso Fritz Kreisler, whose famously honeyed tone Um perhaps aspires to emulate, suggests a performer who knows what she likes and isn't afraid to play it. *April 19 at 7:30.* (212-875-5788.)

Ecstatic Music Festival

Julianna Barwick, a beguiling singer and composer whose digitally looped and layered voice can soothe one minute and soar the next, performs alone and in collaboration with ModernMedieval, a new vocal trio formed by Jacqueline Horner-Kwiatk, formerly of Anonymous 4, and Martha Cluver and Eliza Bagg, members of Roomful of Teeth. The program also includes new pieces by Caroline Shaw and Caleb Burhans. *April 19 at 7:30.* (Merkin Concert Hall. merkinhall.org.)

"Composer Portrait": Frederic Rzewski

Rzewski is associated most closely with the piano, his instrument of choice, for which he has crafted a formidable canon suffused with personality and conscience. How refreshing, then, to have this opportunity to hear the excellent Del Sol Quartet perform the string quartet that Rzewski wrote in 1955, at the age of seventeen, alongside a new piece, "*Words*," commissioned by the ensemble and Miller Theatre and completed by the composer just before his eightieth birthday. *April 19 at 8.* (2960 Broadway. millertheatre.com.)

Julia Bullock

With an intrepid artistic spirit and a voice of wide-ranging hues, the soprano explores the contributions of women—specifically, black women—to art music, jazz, and the blues. Samuel Barber's evocative "*Hermit Songs*," originally performed by Leontyne Price, shares a program with pieces by Billie Holiday and Nina Simone ("*Four Women*"); John Arida accompanies on piano. *April 20 at 7:30.* (Weill Recital Hall. 212-247-7800.)

Lawrence Brownlee at Zankel Hall

"*Cycles of My Being*," an eagerly anticipated new set of songs, written by Tyshawn Sorey for this expressive tenor, explores "the realities of life as a black man in America." Following a nationwide tour, it receives its New York premiere from an all African-American ensemble, conducted by the composer. That's draw enough, but Brownlee and his accompanist Myra Huang also offer the week's second chance to hear Schumann's "*Dichterliebe*," in what will doubtless be another accomplished performance. *April 24 at 7:30.* (212-247-7800.)

New York Festival of Song at 30

Established in 1988 by the pianists and curators Steven Blier and Michael Barrett, this inimitable concert series has celebrated song in all its many forms—lieder and pop, hymns and show tunes—with sly thematic programs that tease out dormant connections. In the process, the festival has deployed (and often discovered) many of the city's finest voices. Eight prominent alumni, including Lauren Worsham, Paul Appleby, William Sharp, and Julia Bullock, cap off a week of song with a celebration of the festival's anniversary. *April 24 at 8.* (Merkin Concert Hall. merkinhall.org.)

MOVIES



Sandrine Bonnaire and Eriq Ebouaney play a couple in Paris whose relationship is threatened by legal obstacles in *"A Season in France."*

World Wars

Mahamat-Saleh Haroun's films explore the politics of migration.

The Chadian director Mahamat-Saleh Haroun is the subject of a welcome retrospective at BAM, April 20-25. It features the U.S. première of his new film, *"A Season in France,"* in which Haroun, who has been living in France since 1982, bitterly confronts the shame and the scandal of that country's xenophobic rejection of recent African and Asian migrants.

"A Season in France" is the story of Abbas (Eriq Ebouaney), a refugee from the Central African Republic who, with his two young children, Asma (Aalayna Lys) and Yacine (Ibrahim Burama Darboe), has fled a conflict in which his wife, Madeleine, was killed. Abbas, a former teacher, lives in Paris and works at a wholesale produce market. He's in a relationship with a co-worker named Carole (Sandrine Bonnaire), an immigrant from Poland; his colleague from home, Étienne (Bibi Tanga), a former professor who fled with them, is a regular presence in the household. The stability and safety

of Abbas's family depend on a court decision about their application for asylum. Meanwhile, the family is shunted from apartment to apartment. When the appeal is rejected, Abbas hopes to remain in France nonetheless, but his effort puts Carole at serious legal risk.

"A Season in France" is a sort of ghost story—it's haunted by the phantom of Madeleine (Sandra Nkake), whose virtual presence weighs on Abbas's conscience and on his relationship with Carole. But, above all, Haroun looks keenly at the migrants' practical struggles: Étienne's hygiene at a communal bathhouse and his job as a security guard; Asma and Yacine's awareness of the dangers that they left behind in Africa and of the bureaucratic sword of Damocles that's hanging over them. The movie's central sequence—Carole's birthday party, in her apartment, with Abbas and his children—is a long and complex scene filmed in a matched pair of extended static takes. It's a cheerful, familial moment realized as a sort of theatre of ordinariness that exalts the simple pleasures of a life in safety as an elusive paradise, one that's brutally threat-

ened by the hands-on violence concealed in France's administrative indifference.

Haroun's first feature, *"Bye Bye Africa,"* from 1999, is another story of a single father and his two children. Here, Haroun plays a character with his name. Mahamat-Saleh, a filmmaker living in France, has been away from his home town of N'Djamena for ten years. After his mother dies, he returns home, alone, and intends to make a film there. Mahamat-Saleh shoots documentary footage—including a study of the decline of Chad's film industry, featuring a close look at the decaying movie palaces of his youth and at the economic and political threats to the African cinema. He also dramatizes, with anguish, the aftermath of his personal relationship with an actress who lives there. Mahamat-Saleh launches a public campaign for the production of the movie he wants to make, called *"Bye Bye Africa"*—and his casting tapes provide a crucial critique of his own methods, and of his divided sensibility, as he struggles to reconcile his French artistic education with his African identity.

—Richard Brody

NOW PLAYING

Blockers

The simple setup of this teen-centric comedy, directed by Kay Cannon, yields clever and hearty complications. Three suburban girls—friends since first grade, now high-school seniors—make a pact to lose their virginity on prom night; their parents get wind of the scheme and crash the party to thwart it. The confident Julie (Kathryn Newton) has a long-term boyfriend (Graham Phillips), the adventuresome Kayla (Geraldine Viswanathan) chooses a candidate (Miles Robbins) on a whim, and Sam (Gideon Adlon) is attracted to another girl (Ramona Young) but hasn't come out, and goes to the prom with a boy (Jimmy Bellinger). A boatload of parents and guardians get pulled into the action, but the principal trio is Julie's mother (Leslie Mann), Kayla's father (John Cena), and Sam's father (Ike Barinholtz), who bear their own emotional baggage and give the movie its comedic energy. There's plenty of rowdy sexual humor (Cena's athletic-coach character is the butt of much of it) that plays like counterpoint to the girls' exuberant, earnest striving toward maturity. The absurdity of the parents' intervention gets symbolic weight from the deftly destructive physical comedy that they have to endure. With Gary Cole and Gina Gershon, as randy neighbors.—*Richard Brody* (In wide release.)

Chappaquiddick

A perfunctory, only mildly absorbing historical drama, about the 1969 incident in which Senator Edward Kennedy (played by Jason Clarke) left a party with his late brother Robert's former staff member Mary Jo Kopechne (Kate Mara) and drove his car off a bridge, resulting in her death. The drama, written by Taylor Allen and Andrew Logan and directed by John Curran, details what Kennedy did that night and how he handled the inevitable legal and public-relations problems in the week that followed. The answer: badly. The story is centered on the conflict between Kennedy's conscience—embodied and emboldened by his cousin Joe Gargan (Ed Helms)—and his self-interest, represented and advanced by the family patriarch, Joe Kennedy (Bruce Dern). Ailing and disabled but still ferocious, Joe puts Ted in the hands of the family's high-powered fixers, including Robert McNamara (Clancy Brown), who pull mighty strings to keep him out of jail and in the Senate, even as the Senator himself vacillates and blunders. But the sketches of Kennedy-family tensions and loyalties are thin and simplistic; the action rushes by with little insight or context.—*R.B.* (In wide release.)

Godard Mon Amour

Even if this drama, directed by Michel Hazanavicius, weren't based on the true story of the relationship between the filmmaker Jean-Luc Godard and the actress Anne Wiazemsky, in 1967 and 1968, but were merely the story of a pair of fictional artists in political and romantic conflict, it would sink under the weight of its witless vulgarity. Louis Garrel stars as Godard, who took an intense interest in left-wing ideologies and their cinematic implications and, at thirty-seven, was active in the Events of May, 1968, taking a leading role in shutting down the Cannes Film Festival. Stacy Martin plays the twenty-year-old Wiazemsky (on whose memoir the movie is based) as she attempts to join Godard in his working life but finds herself shunted aside by his newfound political passions and wounded by his temperamental, egotistical outbursts. Hazanavicius skips

over the detailed observations and nuanced insights of Wiazemsky's book in favor of parodies of Godard's earlier work, replacing its vast substance, fierce originality, and unsparing intimacy with empty stylistic winks. He also eliminates most of the fascinating, ambitious activities that nourished the couple's romance and their art (such as meetings with John Lennon and Paul McCartney), and reduces his world-historical protagonists to figments of his own thin imagination. In French.—*R.B.* (In limited release.)

Jeannette

Bruno Dumont depicts the childhood of Joan of Arc—her early days of charity and despair in a war-ravaged region, her religious calling, and her decision to lead the French into battle against the English occupiers—as a starkly inventive, ecstatically energetic rock opera, filmed on location in raw and rustic landscapes. At the age of eight, Joan—called Jeannette (played by Lise Leplat Prudhomme)—summons a nun named Gervaise (played by the identical twins Aline and Elise Charles) to discuss faith and justice; their extended disputations are punctuated by acrobatics and guitar-fueled hair-whipping. Jeannette is visited by Sts. Catherine, Margaret, and Michael, who appear to her suspended in glowing sunlight above a sparkling stream and rouse her to action. Then, the teen-age Joan (Jeanne Voisin) prepares to run away from home and save France. The characters, filmed with a whirling and gyrating camera, sing and dance to the music of Igorrr, which ranges from power ballads to hip-hop, in choreography by Philippe Decouflé that exalts the awkward grace of daily gestures. Dumont films Joan's spiritual conflicts and confrontations with playful exuberance but avoids frivolity; the ardent actors infuse Joan's spirit of revolt with the eternal passions of youth. In French.—*R.B.* (In limited release.)

Lean on Pete

In his previous film, "45 Years" (2015), the British director Andrew Haigh explored the later stages of a marriage. Now, shifting from rural England to Oregon but sustaining the air of sorrow, he turns to a young man on the brink of adulthood. Charley Thompson (Charlie Plummer), who lacks a mother and lives with his feckless father (Travis Fimmel), is only in his mid-teens, yet his lean and solemn features and his skinny frame suggest that he has already seen and suffered enough. In the wake of a crisis, he moves out and flees, linking up with a grumpy horse trainer named Del (Steve Buscemi), who needs a helper. The sole source of joy in Charley's life is Lean on Pete (Pete for short), one of Del's horses, who is nearing the end of his racing days, and the movie, marked by a helpless sense of drift, measures the deepening bond between the horse and the kid. Haigh is no sentimentalist, and happy endings, you soon realize, will be in short supply. Buscemi seems misplaced in this environment, as does Chloë Sevigny, in the role of a jockey, but Plummer's grave presence holds the story tight.—*Anthony Lane* (Reviewed in our issue of 4/9/18.) (In limited release.)

A Quiet Place

Behind John Krasinski's film lies a pleasingly plain idea. The world has been ravaged by sightless monsters, whose enormous ears allow them to pick up the faintest noise—human speech, say—and attack its source. Thus it is that Lee Abbott (Krasinski), his wife, Evelyn (Emily Blunt), and their children, Regan (Millicent Simmonds) and Marcus (Noah Jupe), pursue their lives, as best

they can, amid the sounds of silence. In an isolated farmhouse, they walk barefoot along soft paths and communicate in sign language. (Simmonds, a determined presence onscreen, is deaf; you can feel the other actors taking their cues from her.) Dialogue is sparse, although Lee and his son can talk if drowned out by a thundering waterfall. The movie is curt and crisp, easily skirting the gaps in its plot, and the set pieces are laid out at careful intervals; one sequence, packed with fear and resourcefulness, is set in a corn silo. Krasinski has not really made a horror film; rather, he has taken the warmest of American themes—the solace of family and home—and chilled it with suspense. Take popcorn if you must, but crunch it at your peril.—*A.L.* (4/16/18) (In wide release.)

Ready Player One

Steven Spielberg goes back to the future, forward to the past, and in any other direction that he likes. The year is 2045, and the setting is a semi-slim in Columbus, Ohio, where Wade Watts (Tye Sheridan), like everybody else, devotes as much time as possible to life in the Oasis. This is an online world, created by a guru named Halliday (Mark Rylance), who has since died, though he still exists in digital form. The Oasis is a paradise of pop culture, littered with offcuts of old movies, computer games, and TV shows. Most of them hail from the later nineteen-seventies and eighties—the period, that is, in which Spielberg established his cultural dominance. Once in the virtual zone, Wade enrolls in a road race and other challenges with a view to winning a powerful prize: control of the Oasis itself. He is joined in his quest by friendly rivals, such as Art3mis (Olivia Cooke), and corporate foes, like Nolan Sorrento (Ben Mendelsohn at his meanest), all of them in the guise of avatars. The movie repeatedly astounds, as you would expect from Spielberg; more surprising, and less welcome, is the mildness of its emotional punch.—*A.L.* (4/9/18) (In wide release.)

The Rider

In Chloé Zhao's fusion of fiction and documentary, the real-life cowboy Brady Jandreau plays a cowboy named Brady Blackburn, who, like Jandreau, has suffered a traumatic head injury in a rodeo. With a fractured skull and unabated seizures, Brady—who seems to be about twenty years old—isn't supposed to ride again. But his sense of identity is closely bound up with his locally celebrated way with horses, and he needs to figure out what to do with his time and, for that matter, with the rest of his life. Brady lives with his father, Wayne (played by Jandreau's father, Tim), a horse trader, and his fifteen-year-old sister, Lilly (Jandreau's sister Lilly), who's developmentally disabled, and whose remarks and actions are graceful and imaginative. Brady takes a frustrating job at a local supermarket, but his rodeo-riding friends push him to return to competition; meanwhile, he spends time at a rehab center with a gravely disabled friend from the rodeo circuit, Lane Scott (playing himself). Those scenes, of Brady coaching Lane, are deeply moving; others, of Brady training horses with a rare (if undiscussed) aptitude, are exhilarating; the documentary core of the film has an emotional authenticity that the dramatic sequences rarely match.—*R.B.* (In limited release.)

Where Is Kyra?

Unemployed and looking for work, Kyra (Michelle Pfeiffer) lives with her elderly and ailing mother, Ruth (Suzanne Shepherd), in a dark apartment in a rumpled Brooklyn neighborhood. Kyra meets a struggling cabdriver named Doug



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(Kiefer Sutherland) in a nearby bar, and they begin a relationship. But Kyra's situation doesn't improve; when Ruth dies, Kyra is left without an income, and, in danger of being evicted from her apartment, she impersonates her late mother and cashes her pension and disability checks. Andrew Dosunmu directs this drama with obvious empathy but little curiosity; working with the extraordinary cinematographer Bradford Young, he frames the action in static takes, sunk in sepulchral shadows, that mainly keep at a restrained distance from the characters. The script, by Darci Picoult, does little to illuminate thoughts, plans, or lives; the banal dialogue is delivered at a slow and pause-riddled pace, as if to infuse it with meaning and emotion that it doesn't contain. Though the on-location filming is moody and evocative, the action plays like the bare-bones sketch of a drama that's still waiting to be developed.—*R.B.* (In wide release.)

You Were Never Really Here

Lynne Ramsay's film, her first feature since "We Need to Talk About Kevin" (2011), stars Joaquin Phoenix as Joe, who is hired to solve other people's problems. The solution tends to involve extreme brutality, with Joe favoring a hammer as his weapon of choice. His latest task is to find a teen-age girl named Nina (Ekaterina Samsonov), the daughter of a New York state senator, who has run away and, it is said, fallen into the clutches of sex traffickers. (We are asked to believe that they serve the dark needs of the political establishment. It's that kind of movie.) Joe dispenses justice whenever it is required, but such righteous vengeance brings him no relief; every deed, thanks to Phoenix's frighteningly glum performance, is done with a penitential air. Piece by piece, in quick flashbacks, Ramsay reveals her hero's wretched past—a boyhood wrecked by an abusive father, and a stint in the U.S. military, which also entailed the damaging of a child. The spell of suffering is rarely broken, sustained as it is by the intensity of the director's style, with its unyielding closeups and its weirdly heightened sounds. Jonny Greenwood contributes a hypnotizing score.—*A.L.* (4/16/18) (In wide release.)

Zama

The bureaucratic and intimate frustrations of a Spanish magistrate in a remote Argentinean outpost in the eighteenth century furnish the director Lucrecia Martel's new film with rarefied passions and inspire a highly original style to match. The middle-aged official, Diego de Zama (Daniel Giménez Cacho), is posted far from his wife and children, and his relentless requests for a transfer are mocked and ignored by local governors. One young subordinate openly defies him; another, a writer, troubles his conscience. He hears from Spanish settlers who've murdered the indigenous population and now lack slaves; an aristocratic woman seeks his help and toys with his affections. With a dreamlike obliviousness, Zama observes and colludes in the brutal injustices on which the colonial regime runs. Then, in despair, he volunteers for a dangerous mission in pursuit of bandits. Adapting a novel by Antonio Di Benedetto, Martel creates a cinema of dialectical tensions; the bustling activity of offices and drawing rooms veers outside the frame while voices of authority and complaint assail the hero with a bewildering tangle of conflicting demands and desires. The dramatic fusion of physical and administrative power captures nothing less than the bloody forging of modernity. In Spanish.—*R.B.* (In limited release.)

DANCE

Lar Lubovitch Dance Company

For fifty years, Lubovitch has gone his own way, making deeply musical, emotionally rich works that eschew irony or modishness. This week, the seventy-five-year-old choreographer marks his artistic half century with three programs at the Joyce, performed by his company and guest artists. Programs A and B include his newest dance, "Something About Night," a quiet, meditative quintet set to works for male vocal ensemble by Schubert. Program B features a quartet of Joffrey Ballet dancers performing excerpts from his 1997 retelling of Shakespeare's "Othello." Dancers from George Mason University will perform his "A Brahms Symphony" (1985), long considered a signature work, in Program C. (175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 212-242-0800. April 17-22.)

Basil Twist / "Symphonie Fantastique"

This musical puppet extravaganza premiered twenty years ago. To Berlioz's fantastical score, Twist creates a world out of bits of fabric, plastic, and tinsel, all of which move in mesmerizing slow motion inside a giant tank of water, resulting in a kind of magical mystery realm. The music, in a piano arrangement by Franz Liszt, is played live by Christopher O'Riley. Not to be missed. (HERE, 145 Sixth Ave., near Spring St. 866-811-4111. April 17-22 and April 24. Through June 17.)

"Suspending Time" / Nora Chipaumire

For the past few weeks, the arts organization Pentacle has been presenting short dance pieces in the galleries of the Rubin Museum of Art, each inspired by the museum's collections. Next up is a work by the Zimbabwe-born choreographer Nora Chipaumire, always a take-no-prisoners, commanding force, in three twenty-minute performances throughout the day. (150 W. 17th St. 212-620-5000. April 18.)

V.4 Dance Festival

The Visegrád Group, a cultural and political alliance among Hungary, Poland, Slovakia, and the Czech Republic, has lately been showing signs of political dissension, but aesthetic commonalities can still be discerned in the selections for this two-night festival. "Guide," by Věra Ondrašíková, from the Czech Republic, is all about lasers and planes of light; "Wow," by Stanislava Vlčeková, of Slovakia, uses video to demonstrate the decline of Western civilization. In "Total," the Polish choreographer Pawel Sakowicz presents a mock lecture about virtuosity, while László Fülöp and Emese Cuhorka, from Hungary, offer an absurdist, self-referential take on dance performance in "Your Mother at My Door." (N.Y.U. Skirball, 566 LaGuardia Pl. 212-998-4941. April 19-20.)

"Dancing the Gods"

This annual festival, organized by the World Music Institute, brings topnotch classical Indian dance to New York. On April 21, the young Mumbai-based dancer and choreographer Amrita Lahiri will present a solo evening of *kuchipudi*, a dance from the Eastern state of Andhra Pradesh, full of silvery jumps and finely wrought mime. The following night, a group billed as the Dancing Monks of Assam performs in a style rarely seen in the U.S., *sattriya*. This dance-drama form, which involves singing and drumming, has been practiced by men in the monasteries of Assam since the fifteenth century. In the twentieth century, women have also been allowed to dance it. Here, the monks will be joined by two women practitioners, Madhusmita Bora and Prerona Bhuyan, whose Sattriya Dance Company is based in Philadelphia. (Symphony Space, Broadway at 95th St. 212-864-5400. April 21-22.)



Nora Chipaumire performs a site-specific work in a gallery at the Rubin Museum of Art.

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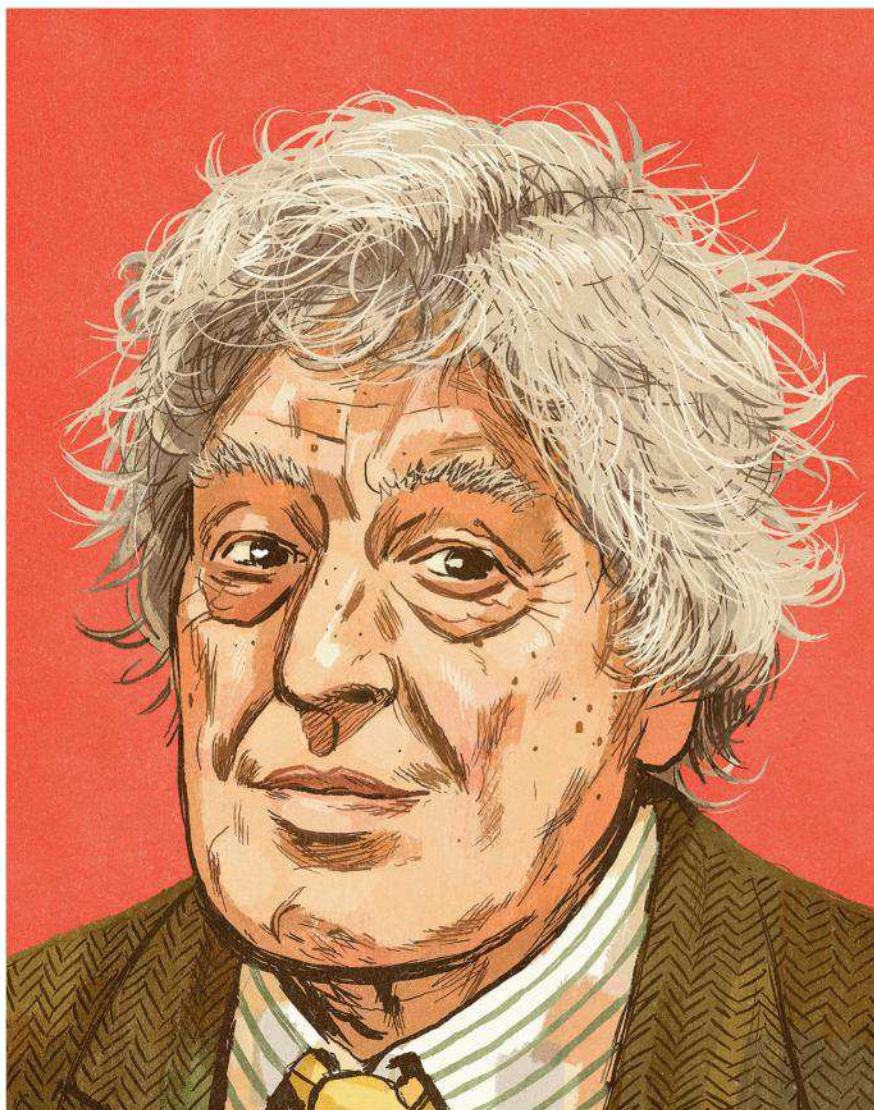
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THE THEATRE



Cult of Personality

Tom Stoppard discusses the return of his play "Travesties."

The playwright Tom Stoppard was in town recently, to see previews of his 1974 play, "Travesties." The drama is set in Zurich in 1917, and, amid Stoppard's layered, brilliant verbal erudition, it defends the purpose of art as an activity that can grant a sliver of immortality. Central to the action are James Joyce, the poet and Dada founder Tristan Tzara, and Vladimir Lenin—all of whom landed in Zurich during the First World War—and a production of Oscar Wilde's "The Importance of Being Earnest." The

revival, directed by Patrick Marber, originated in London in 2016; it opens on Broadway, at the American Airlines Theatre, on April 24.

Stoppard, who looks younger than his eighty years and carries with him what Marber calls "his kingly bonhomie," was dressed in an Oxford shirt and a tweed jacket and pants. He took a bite of his eggs and said, "It's the job of the artist, to exploit connections." And then, smiling: "You see, I speak on behalf of the world of the artist without hesitation!" He continued, "People don't realize that the part of the playwright is finding something for people to talk about. If you are writing about a histor-

ical episode, or two characters in Hamlet, you have a structure for free."

"Travesties" is narrated by Henry Carr, a real person who worked for the British consulate in Zurich during the war. When he first addresses the audience, he's an old man in a dressing gown, recalling dazzled days; in the main matter of the play, he is a young man. When Stoppard wrote it, he was closer in age to young Henry. Now, almost fifty years later, I asked if seeing "Travesties" was like looking through the other end of a telescope. "If I'm involved in a production, it always feels in the foreground again," Stoppard said. He went on, "Patrick made suggestions so radical I personally wouldn't have thought of making them, but I'm grateful. For example, he said, 'It's a great shame that Lenin doesn't put in an appearance in the first act.' And I said, 'Hard luck, he doesn't,' and we left it there. Unlike with a new play, when I'm in rehearsal all the time, in a revival, especially with someone like Patrick, I go away and come back. So the next time I fetched up at the rehearsal there was Lenin in Act I, and he was playing a lute!"

I asked Stoppard why the characters don't talk much about the First World War. "Don't they? Well, it's not really about that," he said. "The play is a kind of luxury, in which you pretend that James Joyce was there in Zurich at the same time as Lenin and Tristan Tzara. It's a kind of intellectual entertainment." He paused. "It's something I wanted to write about at the time. That's not altered. It feels alive. In a subtle way, one is watching and listening as if it is a laboratory experiment."

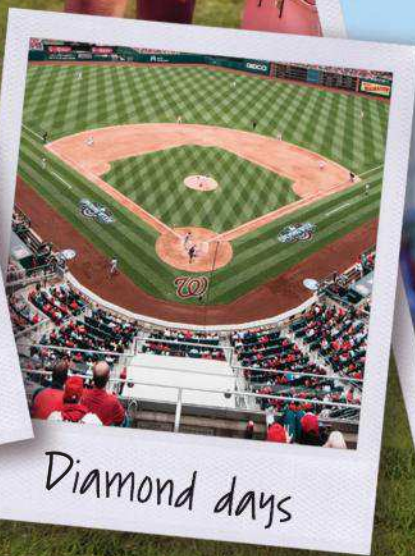
It's an experiment that yields new results. A recurring trope of the play—one of ten or so things that Stoppard investigates—is what to do about the news. "Anything of interest?" Henry Carr asks, each morning, when his manservant brings in the newspapers—a line that a New York audience greeted last week with exhausted laughter.

—Cynthia Zarin

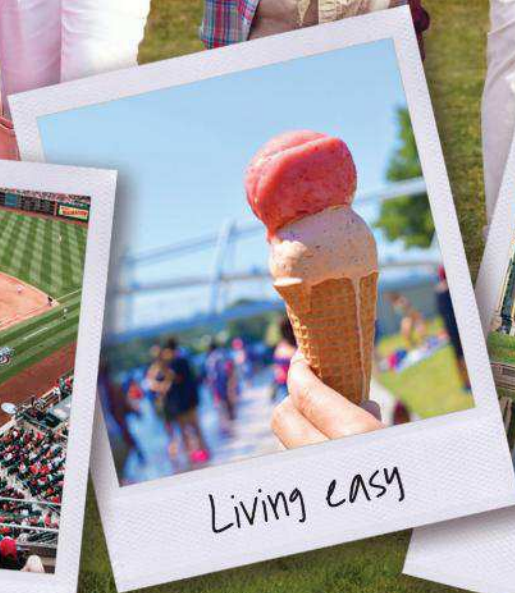
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OPENINGS AND PREVIEWS

Harry Potter and the Cursed Child, Parts One and Two

J. K. Rowling's tale picks up nineteen years after the novels end, in this play by Jack Thorne, staged by John Tiffany in two installments. (*Lyric*, 214 W. 43rd St. 877-250-2929. In previews. Opens April 22.)

Henry V

The Public's Mobile Unit performs the history play in its home theatre after touring New York City community venues. Robert O'Hara directs. (*Public*, 425 Lafayette St. 212-967-7555. Previews begin April 23.)

The Iceman Cometh

Denzel Washington stars in George C. Wolfe's revival of the Eugene O'Neill drama, set in a Greenwich Village saloon populated by dead-end dreamers. (*Jacobs*, 242 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. In previews.)

Light Shining in Buckinghamshire

Rachel Chavkin ("The Great Comet") directs Caryl Churchill's political drama from 1976, which retells the revolutionary history of England in the sixteen-forties. (*New York Theatre Workshop*, 79 E. 4th St. 212-460-5475. In previews.)

The Metromaniacs

Red Bull Theatre stages David Ives's adaptation of the 1738 farce "La Métromanie," by Alexis Piron, in which a Parisian bard falls in love with a poetess in disguise. Michael Kahn directs. (*The Duke on 42nd Street*, 229 W. 42nd St. 646-223-3010. In previews. Opens April 22.)

My Fair Lady

Lerner and Loewe's classic 1956 musical returns to Broadway, in a Lincoln Center Theatre revival directed by Bartlett Sher and starring Lauren Ambrose, Harry Hadden-Paton, and Diana Rigg. (*Vivian Beaumont*, 150 W. 65th St. 212-239-6200. In previews. Opens April 19.)

Paradise Blue

Ruben Santiago-Hudson directs Dominique Morisseau's play, about a jazz trumpeter in Detroit's gentrifying Black Bottom neighborhood in 1949. (*Pershing Square Signature Center*, 480 W. 42nd St. 212-244-7529. Previews begin April 24.)

Saint Joan

Condola Rashad plays Joan of Arc in the George Bernard Shaw drama, revived by Manhattan Theatre Club and directed by Daniel Sullivan. (*Samuel J. Friedman*, 261 W. 47th St. 212-239-6200. In previews.)

The Seafarer

Matthew Broderick stars in Ciarán O'Reilly's revival of the Conor McPherson drama, in which a stranger arrives at a Dublin home during a Christmas Eve poker game. (*Irish Repertory*, 132 W. 22nd St. 212-727-2737. Opens April 18.)

Summer

Des McAnuff directs a musical based on the life and work of the disco queen Donna Summer, with three actresses—LaChanze, Ariana DeBose, and Storm Lever—sharing the title role. (*Lunt-Fontanne*, 205 W. 8th St. 877-250-2929. In previews. Opens April 23.)

Summer and Smoke

Transport Group's Jack Cummings III directs the Tennessee Williams drama, in which a Southern minister's daughter falls in love with the neighborhood doctor. (*Classic Stage Company*, 136 E. 13th St. 866-811-4111. In previews.)

Transfers

In Lucy Thurber's play, directed by Jackson Gay for MCC, two students from the South Bronx compete for a scholarship at an elite university. (*Lucille Lortel*, 121 Christopher St. 866-811-4111. In previews. Opens April 23.)

NOW PLAYING

Aloha, Aloha, or When I Was Queen

In 1993, Eliza Bent, a white teen-ager in a middle-class suburb of Boston, made a home movie in which she played Liliuokalani, the last queen of the Kingdom of Hawaii. A quarter century later, the memory of this highly unwoke act of cultural appropriation becomes the jumping-off point for a wry solo meditation on race, class, and gender. Some of what follows is intentionally cringe-inducing, like an anecdote about a well-meaning white fourth grader who showed up to school dressed as Harriet Tubman, complete with blackface. Other moments are calibrated to inspire but come off as dorm-room introspections, as when Bent contemplates how to "claim space while raising up the voices of others." This is the work of a talented actress with a big heart, but it's less a theatre piece than a seventy-five-minute TED talk on intersectionality. (*Abrons Arts Center*, 466 Grand St. 212-598-0400. Through April 21.)

Angels in America

In Marianne Elliott's revival of Tony Kushner's brilliant, maddening, and necessary masterpiece, the Angel (Amanda Lawrence) looks like a refugee from an old, crumbling discothèque, or like an Edward Gorey drawing. Elliott, who has won two Tonys, is especially adept at stage choreography, though she does nothing to tone down the play's butch-femme dichotomy. (Andrew Garfield, as a gay man with AIDS, engages too much in the limp-wristed school of acting.) The nearly eight-hour, two-part play is filled with wishes, hope, rabbinical anger, fantasy—and with the kinds of errors in characterization that are bound to happen when big ideas come fast and furious, and when authentic characters with beautifully confused intentions serve or get run over by those ideas. But, just when you think Kushner is losing sight of how to handle his creations, he brings out a new and hitherto unexplored empathy for a family that is not biological, let alone chosen. (Reviewed in our issue of 4/16/18.) (*Neil Simon*, 250 W. 52nd St. 877-250-2929.)

Children of a Lesser God

James Leeds, a speech therapist, arrives at a school for the deaf and the hard of hearing to find the one student he can't open up to his idea of communication: Sarah, a deaf cleaning woman who refuses to use her voice. James and Sarah fall in love, but what does love mean when you can't share music, or silence, or speech? Sadly, Kenny Leon's clunky revival of Mark Medoff's drama, which won the 1980 Tony Award, sidelines the script's ambiguities—and its eroticism—in favor of its didacticism, treating Leeds (the monotonous Joshua Jack-

son) as a kind of Henry Higgins in need of saving by Sarah (the lovely Lauren Ridloff). Some cheeseball design choices—bell-bottoms, a Stevie Wonder track—do the semi-dated play no favors. Still, it's thrilling to watch a marital fight in sign language, with hands that scream, "Listen!" (*Studio 54*, at 254 W. 54th St. 212-239-6200.)

The Edge of Our Bodies

In this near-solo piece from 2011, the playwright Adam Rapp ("Red Light Winter") follows the sixteen-year-old Bernadette (Carolyn Molloy) as she travels from her Vermont boarding school to Brooklyn, where she plans to tell her boyfriend that she's pregnant. The problem is that the script, laced with literary references (Bernadette is in a school production of "The Maids") and dark humor (a sexual encounter with a married man is especially bleak), doesn't feel very theatrical. In Jacqueline Stone's staging for the TUTA company, Bernadette narrates most of the show from behind a scrim. Amping up the artificiality, she appears to be in a sound booth: a reel-to-reel recorder lurks in the background, and red bulbs emit vaguely ominous light. Stone tries to create an almost fantastical atmosphere, but Rapp's text would work just as well as a short story. (*59E59*, at 59 E. 59th St. 212-279-4200. Through April 22.)

Frozen

The Disney juggernaut takes its inevitable victory lap on Broadway, directed by Michael Grandage. In the northern land of Arendelle, Princess Anna (the winning Patti Murin, a skilled comedian) is estranged from her older sister, Elsa (the silver-voiced Caissie Levy), whose magic powers to turn things to ice are hidden from Anna after a childhood accident. The rudimentary projections and slow-moving ice sets are an unfortunate downgrade from the animation, and most of the dozen new songs added by the original songwriters, Kristen Anderson-Lopez and Robert Lopez, are unremarkable. But the show has its attractions: the fantastic diverse cast (including Jelani Alladin, adorable as the strapping ice-monger Kristoff); Elsa's electric costume change at the climax of "Let It Go," still the most persistent earworm of the Disney oeuvre; and the hilarious second-act number "Hygge," about the Scandinavian concept of coziness, complete with a sauna-themed kick line. (*St. James*, 246 W. 44th St. 866-870-2717.)

Harry Clarke

David Cale's louche one-man drama is back for a return engagement produced by Audible, which has also released it as an audio play. But there's good reason to see it in person: namely, Billy Crudup's full-bodied performance as the title character (and multiple other people). Harry Clarke doesn't exist—he's the invention of one Philip Bruggelstein, a shy, queer boy from the Midwest who discovers his confidence, and his seductive powers, in the form of a Cockney alter ego. Harry worms his way into the life of a handsome stranger, with funny, sexy, and devastating results. Cale's script has the tidy structure—and the mounting implausibilities—of a three-act screenplay. But, like Harry, its sleekness belies a more troubled tale about the psychic costs of passing, whether as a gay man in a straight world or as an Ohio sissy whose truest self turns out to be a swinging Londoner. (*Minetta Lane Theatre*, 18 Minetta Lane. 800-745-3000.)

Lobby Hero

Does anyone do awkward earnestness as well as Michael Cera? In Kenneth Lonergan's 2001 play (revived by Second Stage, inaugurating its new Broadway home), he plays Jeff, the night watchman at a Manhattan apartment building. His boss, William (Brian Tyree Henry), is a black man whose brother has been arrested for a horrible crime; Jeff gets sucked into the coverup and must decide whether to lie to two neighborhood cops, a macho sleazebag (Chris Evans) and a mouthy rookie (Bel Powley). In a "Law & Order" episode, Jeff would be the guy with three lines, but Lonergan expands this hapless Rosenkrantz's story into a funny, provocative study of how difficult it is to weigh right and wrong. The ending may be too tidy—criminal-justice issues certainly haven't had much resolution since the play was written—but Trip Cullman's fine production, wonderfully acted and staged, doesn't miss a nuance or a laugh. (*Helen Hayes, 240 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200.*)

Mean Girls

The witty and withering teen comedy is now a fetch Broadway musical, with an updated script by Tina Fey—this time, the mean girls post mean GIFs—and music by her husband, Jeff Richmond. (The lyrics are by Nell Benjamin.) Erika Henningsen plays Cady, a homeschooled math whiz who relocates from Africa to Illinois, where she must navigate the wilds of an American high school. At first, she falls in with the "art freaks," who persuade her to infiltrate the Plastics: a cabal of popular girls ruled by the glossy tyrant Regina George (the fearsome Taylor Louderman). Fey's 2004 screenplay is so taut and quotable that the addition of songs seems almost gratuitous, and Richmond's music has the interchangeable pop-anthem sound that's become standard on Broadway. But who needs Tina Fey to reinvent musical comedy? She does just fine with the help of the ace director and choreographer Casey Nicholaw ("The Book of Mormon"). (*August Wilson, 245 W. 52nd St. 877-250-2929.*)

Miss You Like Hell

A cross-country road trip that doesn't travel too far, this new musical from Quiara Alegría Hudes ("In the Heights") and Erin McKeown, directed by Lear deBessonet, is politically resonant and dramatically stuck in neutral. When the sixteen-year-old Olivia (Gizel Jiménez) blogs about her suicidal ideation, her mother, Beatriz (Daphne Rubin-Vega, always welcome), arrives to spirit her away. "I wanna mommy the fuck out of my girl," she says. She also wants to drive Olivia to Los Angeles in time to testify on her behalf: Beatriz is undocumented, and her deportation is all but assured. Much is at stake, and still the musical sputters as mother and daughter air past grievances and befriend predictably quirky supporting characters. Most of the ignition trouble lies with McKeown's pop and R. & B. songs, which are pleasant, unassuming, and aggressively deracinated. (*Public, 425 Lafayette St. 212-967-7555.*)

This Flat Earth

Lindsey Ferrentino's new drama is a strange bird: it explores in wrenchingly specific terms the bewildering fear and heartbreak that follow a middle-school mass shooting, but then doesn't seem to know what to do with them. The final scenes, though affecting, feel too indebted to Thornton Wilder in their evocation of the slipstream of

time, and the play's viewpoint is essentially fatalistic in a way that jars uneasily with the current activist moment. As social issues go, it's more interested in class tension than in gun violence, but there it's too heavy-handed. As directed by Rebecca Taichman, the play is most effectively insightful on the misleadingness of signs and symbols: seeming revelations that point to nothing, or meaningless objects suffused with unexpected import. But the heart of this production is Lucas Papaalias, who is unfailingly authentic as the humble and underappreciated father of a girl who survives. (*Playwrights Horizons, 416 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200.*)

Three Tall Women

First staged in New York in 1994, Edward Albee's Pulitzer Prize-winning play bristles with unresolved and unresolvable guilt and, finally, with hatred undone. A (Glenda Jackson), a widow, sits upright in a straight-backed chair, her mouth a red gash—she's rich enough to afford B (Laurie Metcalf), her caretaker, and C (Alison Pill), a lawyer who has come to look after her affairs. In the second half of the play, it becomes clear that A, B, and C are one woman—A—but at different stages of her life. Jackson, a two-time Oscar winner, is a gift that Mantello doesn't so much squander as fail to unwrap. As in much of his directorial work, Mantello reconfigures the script to emphasize the fire-and-brimstone moments that he thinks Broadway audiences will respond to, favoring the flash of show biz over the complications of the flesh. (*4/9/18*) (*Golden, 252 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.*)

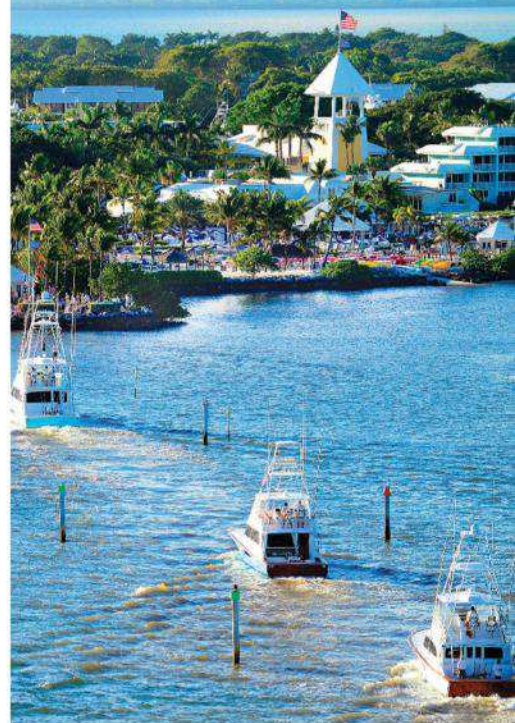
Yerma

After a run at London's Young Vic that was acclaimed, above all, for Billie Piper's fearless and masterly lead performance, the Armory imports Simon Stone's radical reimagining of Federico García Lorca's 1934 play, which transplants the parable of a woman's obsessive effort to conceive a child to a contemporary gentrified London suburb. Every choice feels perfectly calibrated, including the sudden blackouts that terminate each scene, the surround-sound bursts of Stefan Gregory's arresting choral music, and Lizzie Clachan's extraordinary glass-box set, which transforms as inexplicably as a magic trick. The story and its milieu are exceptionally specific, but, by the time the play reaches its inescapable nadir, it seems to describe much more universal nightmares: the terrifying passage of time, the unspeakable explosion of a dream deferred, and the catastrophe of human desire when it becomes ungovernable and unquenchable. (*Park Avenue Armory, Park Ave. at 66th St. 212-933-5812. Through April 21.*)

ALSO NOTABLE

Admissions Mitzi E. Newhouse. • **Amy and the Orphans** Laura Pels. *Through April 22.* • **Bobbie Clearly** Black Box, Harold and Miriam Steinberg Center for Theatre. • **Carousel** Imperial. (Reviewed in this issue.) • **Escape to Margaritaville** Marquis. • **Feeding the Dragon** Cherry Lane. • **Flight** The Heath at the McKittrick Hotel. *Through April 20.* • **King Lear** BAM Harvey Theatre. • **The Lucky Ones** Connelly. • **Mlima's Tale** Public. • **Old Stock: A Refugee Love Story** 59E59. *Through April 22.* • **Pygmalion** Sheen Center. *Through April 22.* • **Rocktopia** Broadway Theatre. • **Travesties** American Airlines Theatre.

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Met Breuer

"Like Life: Sculpture, Color, and the Body"

This is a mind-blowing show, hypercharged with sensation and glutted with instruction. You may be torn between praising it as visionary (and also a great deal of fun, what with entertainments including a voluble animatronic savant) and reporting it as a mugging to the taste police. A hundred and twenty-seven almost exclusively European and American renditions of human bodies, from very old to recent and from masterpieces to curios, elaborate the thesis that colored figurative sculpture has been unjustly bastardized ever since the Renaissance canonized a mistake made during its excited revival of antiquity. The whiteness of surviving Greek and Roman marbles, their original polychromy lost, became *de rigueur* for Western

three-dimensional figuration in subsequent centuries. Great works in the exhibition range from an anonymous German's "Nellingen Crucifix," from 1430-35, and Donatello's "Bust of Niccolò da Uz-zano," from the fourteen-thirties, to contemporary sculptures by Jeff Koons ("Michael Jackson and Bubbles," from 1988) and Charles Ray ("Aluminum Girl," completed in 2003). Crowd-pleasing curiosities include the "Auto-Icon of Jeremy Bentham," from 1832. Sitting on a chair, the realistic wax-faced figure, jauntily clothed and sporting a cane, contains the British philosopher's skeleton. The show's effect, over all, is at once scholarly and populist, like that of a TED talk. *Through July 22.*

Museum of Modern Art

"Being: New Photography 2018"

With its almost absurdly broad theme of "identity and personhood," the latest installment in the museum's long-running showcase of what's

new in photography highlights conceptual portraiture while including some compelling wild cards. The Ethiopian artist Aida Muluneh commands the entrance with painterly images that evoke fashion spreads. Her pictures of dispassionate women in colorful makeup inspired by African body art upbraid the photographic tradition of exoticizing black female subjects. In the slyly satirical black-and-white "Cargo Cults" series, the American artist Stephanie Syjuco, who was born in the Philippines, poses in elaborate costumes of "ethnic" prints and accessories sourced from malls. Other artists use found photos to striking effect. In a collaborative series, Huong Ngo and Hong-An Truong mine their family albums to reflect on the experiences and the cultural invisibility of their mothers, who are both Vietnamese refugees in the United States. The American artist Carmen Winant's deluge of images of women giving birth—some two thousand in all—are taped to a wall in an immersive meditation on an event at once universal and mysterious. The exquisite black-and-white pictures by the Polish photographer Joanna Piotrowska, which conclude the show, underscore moments when the camera's presence registers as an intrusion. *Through Aug. 19.*

Whitney Museum

"Grant Wood: American Gothic and Other Fables"

This retrospective of the Iowan painter fascinates as a plunge into certain deliriums of the United States in the nineteen-thirties, notably a culture war between cosmopolitan and nativist sensibilities. But any notion that Wood—who died in 1942, of pancreatic cancer, on the day before his fifty-first birthday—is an underrated artist fizzles. "American Gothic" is, by a very wide margin, his most effective picture (although "Dinner for Threshers," from 1934, a long, low, cutaway view of a farmhouse at harvesttime, might be his best). Wood was a strange man who made occasionally impressive, predominantly weird, sometimes god-awful art in thrall to a programmatic sense of mission: to exalt rural America in a manner adapted from Flemish Old Masters. "American Gothic"—starchy couple, triune pitchfork, churchy house, bubbly trees—succeeded, deserving the inevitable term "iconic" for its punch and tickling ambiguity. The work made Wood, at the onset of his maturity as an artist, a national celebrity, and the attendant pressures pretty well wrecked him. Why Wood now? A political factor might seem to be in play. Although the show was planned before the election of Donald Trump, it feels right on time, given the worries of urban liberals about the insurgent conservative truculence in what is often dismissed—with a disdain duly noted by citizens of the respective states—as flyover country. *Through June 10.*

Dia:Chelsea

"Rita McBride"

The sixteen beams of green lasers in the American artist's installation "Particulates" form a criss-crossing tubular pattern that suggests a tunnel into another dimension. (Water molecules and "surfactant compounds," whatever those are, are also involved.) It's a familiar form for the American sculptor, recalling her seventeen-story-tall public installation "Mae West," in Munich. Curves somehow constructed out of straight lines are the least of the paradoxes here. Most fascinating is the way in which the light seems to occupy space as a shimmering mass. The psychedelic effect is heightened if you see McBride's piece after viewing Dia's concurrent exhibition of geometric paintings and sculptures by François Morellet. *Through June 2.*



"The Tragic Moor II, August 20, 2017," by the Texas-based Nigerian artist Hakeem Adewumi, in "Refraction: New Photography of Africa and Its Diaspora," at the Kasher gallery. Opens April 19.

Jewish Museum

"Marc Camille Chaimowicz: Your Place or Mine . . ."

Since the nineteen-seventies, when the French-born artist began to regard his small London apartment as a *gesamtkunstwerk*, or "total work of art," Chaimowicz has been exploring the overlap of art and décor with enchanting abandon. His first, career-spanning solo museum exhibition in the U.S. is divided into sections named for domestic interiors, beginning with the lavender-walled "L'Entrée" ("The Entrance"), which features a row of handsome coat hooks, from which customized garments hang, their airy floral prints applied with a paint roller. "La Bibliothèque" ("The Library") displays the disassembled pages of Chaimowicz's delicately illustrated and collaged artist's books; in "Le Salon," he sets the scene for a charmed life with throw pillows, a cocktail glass, and a rotary phone arranged on a rug in shades of lemon, rose, and *eau de nil*, whose ebullient pattern mirrors the playful, Impressionistic motifs of his nearby paintings and screens. The artist makes wonderful use of the museum's Central Park views, bringing the garden indoors with path-like curved platforms that display his parasols, ceramics, lampshades, and furniture, including "Desk on Decline," a non-functional marvel with a sharply slanted top—an invitation to shrug off work and enjoy life. *Through Aug. 5.*

Morgan Library and Museum

"Peter Hujar: Speed of Life"

Hujar, who died of AIDS-related pneumonia in 1987, at the age of fifty-three, was among the greatest of all American photographers and has had, by far, the most confusing reputation. This dazzling retrospective of a hundred and sixty-four pictures, curated by Joel Smith, affirms Hujar's excellence while, if anything, complicating his history. The works range across the genres of portraiture, nudes, cityscape, and still-life—the stilliest of all from the catacombs of Palermo, Italy, shot in 1963. The finest are portraits, not only of people but of cows, sheep, and, most notably, an individual goose, with an eagerly confiding mien. The quality of Hujar's prints, tending to sumptuous blacks and simmering grays, transfixes. He was a darkroom master, maintaining technical standards for which he got scant credit except among certain cognoscenti. He never hatched a signature look to rival those of more celebrated elders who influenced him (Richard Avedon, Diane Arbus) or those of younger peers who learned from him (Robert Mapplethorpe, Nan Goldin). His pictures share, in place of a style, an unflinching rigor that can only be experienced, not described. *Through May 20.*

Neue Galerie

"Before the Fall: German and Austrian Art of the 1930s"

Haunting details give this broad roundup of Austrian and German art from the nineteen-thirties an all-too-vivid sense of the period's mounting anxiety. Hanns Ludwig Katz's "Eye Operation" portrays two corpse-colored hands pulling open a man's eye, as a third hand approaches it with a scalpel. Felix Nussbaum's bone-chilling painting "Self-Portrait in the Camp," made between his escape from a prison camp in southern France and his subsequent murder in Auschwitz, shows the young Surrealist in three-quarter profile against a sand-colored hellscape of loose bones and barbed wire. Well-known touchstones—Max Beckmann's red-and-black "Self-Portrait with

Horn," photographs from August Sanders's "Victims of Persecution" series—give way to a wide array of less familiar revelations, from the political photo collages of Friedl Dicker-Brandeis to Rudolf Wacker's unsettling still-life "Sheep and Doll," in which nursery toys seem to hint at impending atrocities. *Through May 28.*

New Museum

"2018 Triennial: Songs for Sabotage"

This show, co-curated by Alex Gartenfeld and Gary Carrion-Murayari, tethers fresh artists to stale palaver. The work of these twenty-six individuals and groups, ranging in age from twenty-five to thirty-five, from nineteen countries, is for the most part formally conservative (painting, weaving, ceramics). The framing discourse is boilerplate radical, adducing abstract evils of "late capitalism" and (this one may be new to you) "late liberalism," which the artists are presumed to subvert. In principle, the aim reflects the museum's valuable policy of incubating upstart trends in contemporary art. But it comes off as willfully naïve. Nearly all the participants plainly hail from an international archipelago of art schools and hip scenes and have launched on normal career paths. Noting that they share political discontents, as the young tend to do, is easy. Harder, in the context, is registering their originalities as creators—like bumps under an ideological blanket. Two standouts are painters who evince independent streaks at odds with the ideal of collectivity that the curators promulgate. The Kenyan Chemu Ng'ok, who is based in South Africa, has developed a confidently ebullient Expressionism—faces and figures teeming in deep-toned, plangent colors. Even more impressive is the Haitian abstractionist Thomm El-Saieh, who lives in Miami. From a distance, his three large acrylic paintings suggest speckled veils of atmospheric color. Up close, they reveal thousands of tiny marks, blotches, and erasures, each discretely energetic and decisive. *Through May 27.*

Rubin Museum of Art

"Chitra Ganesh: The Scorpion Gesture"

The Brooklyn artist's new animations ingeniously combine her own drawings and watercolors with historical imagery, peppering the journeys of bodhisattvas with contemporary pop-culture references. Five of these pieces are installed on the museum's second and third floors amid its collection of Himalayan art, elements of which appear in her psychedelic sequences of spinning mandalas and falling lotus flowers. (Ganesh's works are activated, as if by magic, when viewers approach.) In "Rainbow Body," a cave, which also appears in a nearby painting of Mandarava, is filled with people in 3-D glasses, watching as the guru-deity attains enlightenment. "Silhouette in the Graveyard" is projected behind a glass case containing a small sculpture of Maitreya, from late-eighteenth-century Mongolia, for a cleverly dioramalike effect. Prophesied to arrive during an apocalyptic crisis, the bodhisattva is seen here against Ganesh's montage, which includes footage of global catastrophes and political protests, from the Women's March to Black Lives Matter. *Through Jan. 7.*

GALLERIES—UPTOWN

Susan Lipper

The title of the New York photographer's black-and-white series "trip, 1993-1999" is lowercase for a reason: the fifty small, unframed prints,

mounted in a continuous dark stripe around the gallery, are a quiet critique of the male-dominated canon of the road-trip picture, in the tradition of Robert Frank and Garry Winogrand. Like her predecessors, Lipper documents her travels in telling fragments, contrasting the romantic myth of the American West with the country's mundane interiors, humble structures, and tumbledown signage. But, in a subtle departure, she leaves traces of her own presence in unpeopled shots. In one image, an untouched Waffle House breakfast rests on a table; in another, the word "motel" is written in soap on a mirror. One of the few figures in the mix suggests a surrogate for the artist—a female mannequin dressed in flannel and jeans, leaning against a tree. *Through May 5. (Higher Pictures, 980 Madison Ave., at 76th St. 212-249-6100.)*

GALLERIES—DOWNTOWN

Lucy Dodd

After entering the gallery through a beaded curtain patterned like an American flag—the show's title, "May Flower," riffs on the founding of the U.S., and also on celebrations of spring—viewers encounter a circle of mystical-looking chairs, arranged around "Prince Porcupine," a canvas leaning against a column on the floor. Like the works mounted on the surrounding walls, the painting's amber depths and jet-black clouds are achieved not with conventional paint but with flower essences, Tetley tea, cuttlefish ink, and yew berries, among other substances. With titles like "The Flight of Aunt Goose" and "Slowly Snail . . . Time Is Creation's Bubble," the artist seems to invite viewers to read her radiant works like Rorschach tests for pagan rites. *Through May 20. (Lewis, 88 Eldridge St. 212-966-7990.)*

Joanne Greenbaum

Forty small plexiglass cubes housing abstract sculptures fill a table in modular columns of four or five—a memory palace of bright color and brisk gesture. Greenbaum is best known for her exuberant abstract paintings; these coiled, squeezed, and extruded little wonders express that same energy in a riot of neon pink and yellow, lavender, molten orange, International Klein Blue, and the shade of pink now known as millennial. The show's title is "Caput Mortuum," which is Latin for "worthless remains." Insignificance has never held more appeal. *Through May 20. (56 Henry, 56 Henry St. 646-858-0800.)*

Cary Leibowitz

In this picnic-themed installation of wooden tables and red gingham flooring, the native New Yorker continues his decades-long quest to entertain with self-deprecation. His text-driven art, which here includes signs and pie charts, white crockery scrawled with black letters, and found photographs doctored with a label-maker, also continues to bring on the camp. Other works include Hollywood publicity stills that read "Elizabeth Taylor Is Thinking About Fried Chicken" and "Joan Collins Has a Headache," and a brightly colored, diamond-shaped plywood panel captioned "Ugh, He's Crying Again." Leibowitz's jokes land best when his pop-cultural insight merges with his satire of self-grandiosity, as in a picture of Milton Berle smoking a cigar, captioned "Cancel All My Appointments with the Whitney." *Through May 13. (Invisible Exports, 89 Eldridge St. 212-226-5447.)*

NIGHT LIFE

Musicians and night-club proprietors lead complicated lives; it's advisable to check in advance to confirm engagements.



Two Jokers

The twin brothers in the Garden are savvy scenesters earning punk yuks.

"All Access," released in 2013, by the Garden, starts off loud and goofy, with a blizzard of hard snares and synth, like an outtake from a John Hughes-era soundtrack. Fletcher Shears goes on to share a bit of life-style advice, extolling the virtues of patience, originality, individualism, and getting a good night's sleep. "In the end, you're on your own," he warns. "Better cook up something good while you're home."

The Garden, which plays at Market Hotel on April 18, has a distinct style: the small band from Orange County, California, employs a fast collage of toy instruments and wordy verses that somehow add up to punk, or rap (or, on at least one track, jungle). The songs are philosophical if you listen closely, and fun if you dance badly; many transform two or three times within three minutes, and they're catchy enough to mumble along to for days. If you ask Fletcher or his twin brother, Wyatt, they'll say that their genre is "vada vada," a term that they made up. They are similarly imaginative songwriters, with stories of dodging cops, molding life like clay, and avoiding bugs hidden in the bodies of suited businessmen. Their best tracks feel like

updates of early skeletal Def Jam productions and New Wave bands. Their over-all message seems to land somewhere near "You can have as much fun as us, if you try."

The twenty-four-year-old Shears brothers are from a musical family. Their father gigged regularly with a local punk band, which meant that there were always instruments around the house. By 2011, the twins had begun releasing limited batches of records on the small label Burger, and they were soon embraced as muses by fashion houses; designers fell for their flowing thrift-store style and costumed performances. The brothers modelled for Yves Saint Laurent in 2013, but swatted away associations with the style sphere. "To me, fashion and music presentation are opposite. No feelings are alike to me. I like them both in different ways, though," Fletcher explained in an interview.

Still, the band has seized on the power of image: its videos are action-packed and theatrical, featuring baseball games, mini-bikes, and cowboy hats. In videos for the Garden's new record, "Mirror Might Steal Your Charm," the brothers reprise the jester characters that they frequently play onstage and on film. "We're here to entertain," Wyatt has said, and ticket holders should have little doubt.

—Matthew Trammell

Bodega Bamz

New York City hip-hop is known for producing vivid storytellers and big characters; the fashionable cluster of young artists that includes A\$AP Mob, Flatbush Zombies, and Bodega Bamz aspired to the latter when they began breaking, around 2012. Bamz delivered his mixtape "Strictly 4 My P.A.P.I.Z." that year, a stab at booming trap influenced by his native Spanish Harlem. "At Close Range" was its best moment, a rare personal look into the rapper's backstory. Bodega Bamz is releasing a new album, and plays a show at S.O.B.'s this week. (204 Varick St., at W. Houston St. 212-243-4940. April 18.)

Built to Spill

This beloved Idaho band has witnessed the past twenty years of alternative rock firsthand, but has never swayed along. The group's 1997 album, "Perfect from Now On," is required listening for those interested in indie-rock history; the guitarist Doug Martsch was inspired to start the group after he moved to Seattle, the birthplace of grunge, and surrounded himself with musicians who were writing droning, emotive songs without commercial aspirations. Built to Spill eventually signed with Warner Bros., and benefitted from the full promotional strength of college stations and other indie outlets. The band's catalogue still endures; at this intimate set at Baby's All Right, added to a co-headlining tour with Afghan Whigs, fans can again express their gratitude. (146 Broadway, Brooklyn. 718-599-5800. April 19.)

James Chance and the Contortions

This legendary short-lived outfit first appeared on Brian Eno's 1978 compilation "No New York," which packaged the city's hippest post-punk bands and christened the No Wave genre. Blending the free-jazz horn theatrics of Ornette Coleman and Albert Ayler with wet, muted funk and showman shrieks ("Contort yourself five times!"), Chance and his group put their stamp on a fringe style that felt at once chicly nostalgic and switchblade sharp. Young contemporary bands still aspire to their plucky, smoky tones and rambling structures. Chance and the Contortions return to the city for a stand at the Bowery Electric. (327 Bowery, at 2nd St. 212-228-0228. April 18.)

Diarrhea Planet

This Nashville-based sextet understands the joys of maximalism and willful stupidity. Look past its name to its live arrangement: four guitar players assemble front and center during performances, each with his own mike. The result is near-perfect garage rock that sounds like a Trans Am revving out front. Effervescent college-radio hits like "Ghost with a Boner" have given way to a more honed sound, exemplified on cuts like "Announcement" and "Bob Dylan's Grandma," from the band's 2016 album, "Turn to Gold." The group was heard in households across the country when it performed the single "Ain't a Sin to Win" on "The Late Show with Seth Meyers"; this year, it has hitched onto a tour with the Darkness, which includes a stop at Brooklyn Steel. (319 Frost St., Williamsburg. 888-929-7849. April 20.)



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MikeQ

The ballroom and vogue music scenes, most famously captured in the documentary film "Paris Is Burning," have been influencing popular culture since the nineteen-eighties, while remaining staunchly underground. Vogue grew out of New York's seventies disco and house eras, and crossed over when Madonna and others cribbed its sounds, its fashion, and its dance moves; today, a new generation maintains the insular, escapist energy that made the original parties special. This twenty-seven-year-old New York-based d.j. started out producing on free software, and soon found himself spinning all over New York as one of the few d.j.s willing to stick to ballroom tracks for entire sets. His first official release came out on Fade to Mind, an agenda-setting Los Angeles record label that specializes in futuristic electronic music. (*House of Yes, 2 Wyckoff Ave., Brooklyn. houseofyes.org. April 18.*)

79.5

This slow-paced, psychedelic outfit is a regular headliner at C'mon Everybody, a pleasantly snug bar, bordering Clinton Hill and Bed-Stuy, that's always good for a night of music that you wouldn't hear anywhere else. The six-person ensemble, named for a radio station at the far left of the dial, relishes in four-part girl-group harmonies; the cooing choral arrangements on its 2012 twelve-inch "Boogie/000" sound like Donna Summer and Evelyn (Champagne) King playing a Steve Rubell club. After a fan-sourced funding campaign, the band is still polishing its

début album, and, with little recorded material released, its precious new tunes may be best experienced in the flesh. (*325 Franklin Ave., Brooklyn. cmoneverybody.com. April 21.*)

JAZZ AND STANDARDS**Joel Forrester**

Although he's fronted many a delightfully twisted ensemble since the 1992 breakup of the Microscopic Septet, Forrester may be best appreciated as a radiant and stylistically uncategorizable pianist and composer in a solo context. Like a present-day Fats Waller, he can dazzle you while making you laugh out loud. (*Jules, 65 Saint Marks Pl. julesbistro.com. April 18.*)

Mike McGinnis, Art Lande, and Steve Swallow

Expecting the conventional from the union of three players as idiosyncratic as the saxophonist and clarinetist McGinnis and the veteran improvisers Lande, on piano, and Swallow, on electric bass, is downright foolish. These simpatico players revel in modernist chamber-jazz that allows for both lyricism and open-ended jostling; they shine on McGinnis's recently released "Singular Awakening." (*Jazz Standard, 116 E. 27th St. 212-576-2232. April 19.*)

Linda May Han Oh Quintet

It seems like just yesterday that the Australian bassist Oh was the new kid in town, daz-

zling listeners with her levitating bass lines; she's since played with such estimable artists as Kenny Barron and Pat Metheny. Now leading her own unit at this most hallowed of jazz venues, Oh fronts a quintet that includes the saxophonist **Ben Wendel**, the pianist **Fabian Almazan**, and the drummer **Rudy Royston**. (*Village Vanguard, 178 Seventh Ave. S., at 11th St. 212-255-4037. April 17-22.*)

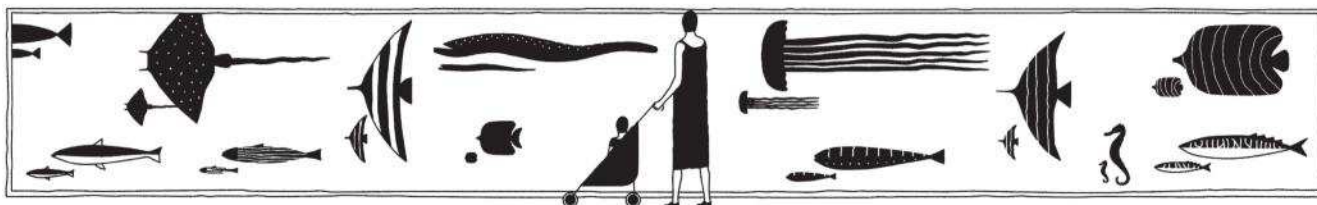
Roberta Piket

An exceptional modern-jazz pianist hovering just under the radar, Piket looks beyond the tradition while tipping her hat to its verities. She's joined by two players who prize invention and subtlety as much as she does: the bassist **Harvie S** and Piket's husband, the crafty drummer **Billy Mintz**. (*Mezzrow, 163 W. 10th St. mezzrow.com. April 19.*)

Kendra Shank

Celebrating her birthday alongside musical buddies, the valiant singer Shank takes to the stage with the pianist **Frank Kimbrough**, the saxophonist **Billy Drewes**, and the bassist **Dean Johnson**, three longtime associates in tune with her audacious juxtaposition of warmhearted winking and out-on-a-limb vocalizing. Bringing lustre to standards, Shank also wisely plumbs the jazz repertoire for hidden gems from the likes of Abbey Lincoln, Fred Hersch, and Cedar Walton. (*Jazz at Kitano, 66 Park Ave., at 38th St. 212-885-7119. April 21.*)

ABOVE & BEYOND

**St. Jordi Festival**

In Barcelona, St. Valentine's seat is occupied by Jordi, a knight who, according to medieval legend, slew a dragon and saved a village, including the daughter of a king; the dragon's blood produced a rosebush where it dripped. Catalans celebrate St. Jordi each April by exchanging roses and books with their loved ones. Two organizations, the Farragut Fund for Catalan Culture in the U.S. and the Catalan Institute of America, aim to broaden the tradition's global recognition with a week of events, including a bookstore crawl and a reading by the Catalan writer Alicia Kopf, at this year's PEN World Voices Festival. (*Various locations. ciofa.org. April 21-23.*)

Sakura Matsuri Cherry Blossom Festival

In the classic Japanese horror film "Under the Blossoming Cherry Trees," from 1975, villagers are warned to avoid passing beneath the picturesque petals, as stories spread of the flowers driving travellers mad. Today, only the allergy-

prone dread the impending bloom of New York's cherry blossoms. The festival celebrating the flowers' arrival is in its fourteenth year at Flushing Meadows Park; this installment will be packed with performances reflecting both traditional and modern Japan, including *taiko* drumming, martial arts, and a cosplay fashion show. (*Pavilion & Astral Fountain in Flushing Meadows-Corona Park. bbg.org. April 21 at 11 A.M.*)

READINGS AND TALKS**PEN World Voices Festival of International Literature**

This literary festival was founded by Salman Rushdie, Esther Allen, and Michael Roberts in the wake of the September 11th attacks, with a mission to foster dialogue among writers from around the globe. This year's edition addresses a newly connected and reimagined world with a program titled "Resist & Reimagine." It includes talks by Sean Penn, R. J. Palacio, and Roxane

Gay, as well as a lecture by Hillary Clinton, who will appear in conversation with the Nigerian author Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie (April 22). (*Various locations. worldvoices.pen.org. April 16-22.*)

The New School

In 2018, the word "scam" has slipped into Internet meme-dom, an online inside joke: youthful users everywhere are concocting schemes that Ralph Kramden couldn't dream up, in relentless over-the-top pursuits of wealth, fame, and social-media followers. (When Virgil Abloh was appointed the menswear designer of Louis Vuitton, the style figure saw one of his old tweets, "Design is the freshest scam," ironically resurface.) At the multi-session talk "Cons and Scams: Their Place in American Culture," several professors and academics trace the history of the scam as a social and political phenomenon, and examine its role in popular culture, art, finance, law, and medicine. The talk is free and open to the public, with no snake oil for sale. (*Theresa Lang Center, 55 W. 13th St. 212-229-5108. April 23-24.*)

FOOD & DRINK



TABLES FOR TWO

Gem

116 Forsyth St.

As a kid, Flynn McGarry knew exactly what he wanted to be when he grew up, but, unlike most kids, he didn't have to wait. By the age of twelve, he was running a supper club out of his bedroom in Los Angeles. At fifteen, he was on the cover of the *Times Magazine*. This year, at nineteen, he's opened a place all his own, called Gem, where he serves many of the dishes himself, wearing an apron with tweezers tucked neatly over the collar. Boyishly slim, with a gravity-defying shock of strawberry-blond hair, he is poised and charming, but retains the slightly reluctant demeanor of someone who might dodge an embarrassing hug and moan "*Mo-o-om*."

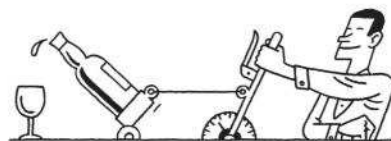
Yet Gem is decidedly mature, the kind of place where most young people would go only if their parents were paying. The service is practiced and hushed—it would be strange to talk loudly here. The restaurant accommodates just thirty-two guests a night, serving a tasting menu that costs a hundred and fifty-five dollars a person, before wine. The tables in the dining room—upscale Scandinavian-bohemian, with mustard-colored corduroy banquettes—feel spaced for comfort and for privacy, and half the restaurant, called the Living Room, used as a café by day, is reserved at night for pre-dinner canapés or for lingering after dessert.

The impeccable, seasonally driven food arrives in a steady parade of tiny, artful arrangements: cubes, foams, and petals of the sort you find at restaurants like Eleven Madison Park (where McGarry interned) and Noma. On a recent evening, wedges of beet—which had been aged, smoked, braised, grilled, roasted, *and* juiced—had sweet, raisiny edges, like sticky candy, and creamy interiors. A "stew" of Norwegian king crab in grapefruit rosewater, the tangle of sweet meat resembling a little mound of pasta, topped with frizzled leeks, rendered my table silent.

But Gem's tasting-menu format, with its sombre, methodical coursing, can feel refined to the point of sanctimony. McGarry has said that the restaurant is meant to emulate a dinner party, a ritual whose appeal is a relaxed, convivial messiness. The closest he gets is with the final course before dessert: a collection of dishes he calls the Feast. On a recent evening, it included lamb two ways—shredded shank braised in cider, and medium-rare medallions of loin dressed in bagna cauda—in a spread that offered a respite from the pressure of savoring each fleeting, precious bite. With Gem, McGarry proves himself to be much more than a whiz kid: he's an exceptionally gifted, inventive chef by any measure. My hope is that, having mastered the rules of fine dining at such a tender age, he will soon feel inspired to break them. (*Tasting menu \$155.*)

—Hannah Goldfield

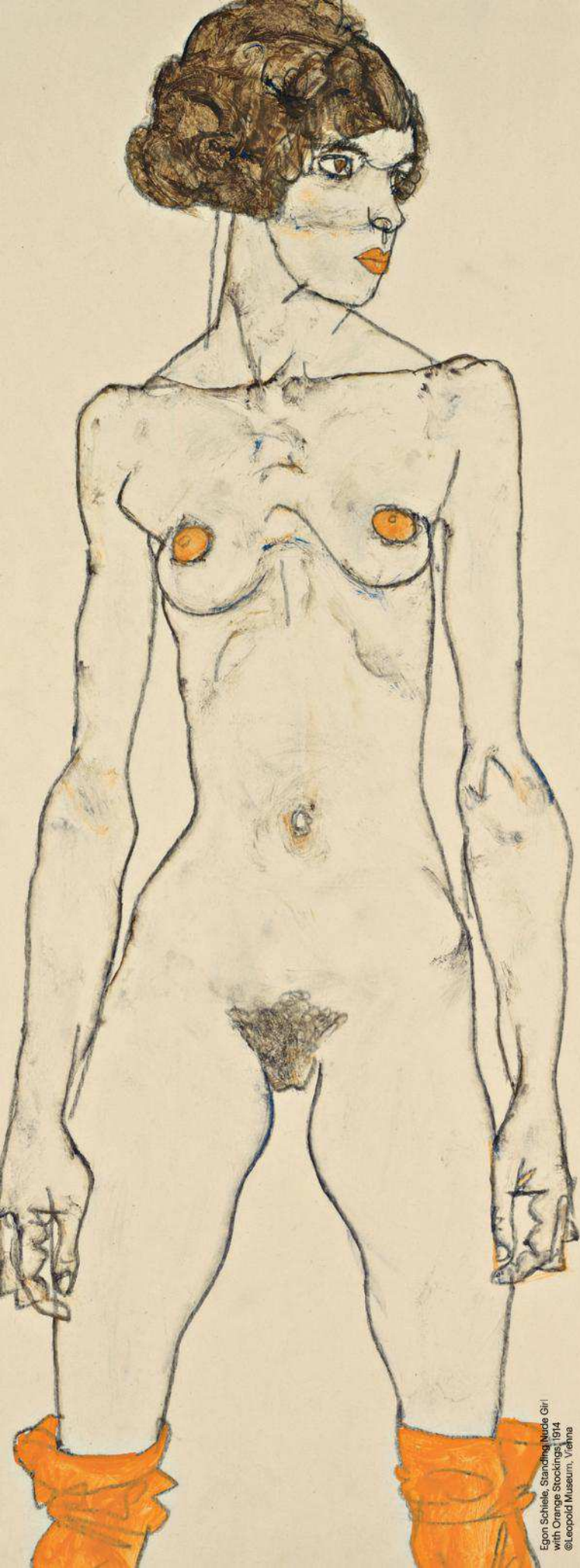
BAR TAB



Ophelia

3 Mitchell Pl., 26th floor (212-980-4796)

On a recent melancholy evening, two young women—one in want of a job, the other disappointed in a man—took an elevator to the twenty-sixth floor of the Beekman Tower. Both sought levity and, perhaps, a celebrity: the rooftop bar, about two months old, advertised that Frank Sinatra had loyally visited a previous iteration, for drinks and, maybe, a heartbreaking song. Instead, the women encountered several quiet customers, most in sweaters, drinking to light techno. Yet they also found, on an enclosed patio, a velvety red banquette good for consoling, undisturbed and unjustled. A beatific hostess appeared in the candlelight. Did the women want drinks? Oh, but they did, and they were grateful to her for not wincing at one woman's decision to pronounce "Pain Killa" with an "a," as written on the menu. At the bar, the twosome ordered again (pink prosecco poured sybaritically over sherry and Campari), beneath a taxidermic bird—an albino pheasant, clarified the bar staff, after a brief conference. The pair took in this deceased fowl, and observed, through the cathedral-like windows, the coy, unforthcoming façades of Midtown East. The effect was to make them feel as if they were in a birdcage, doomed to contemplate unreachable possibilities they should know better than to want. They looked down, through the bar-top glass, at photographs from the establishment's original incarnation, in the nineteen-twenties, as a residence for sorority girls turned working women. "The sweetest group of girls this world has known," went one sorority song, memorialized on notepaper under emptying cocktails, "whose standards are as good as pure as gold." —Elizabeth Barber



Egon Schiele, Standing Nude Girl
with Orange Stockings, 1914
© Leopold Museum, Vienna

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THE TALK OF THE TOWN

COMMENT MIGHT AND RIGHT

In August of 2013, the Syrian regime of Bashar al-Assad fired rockets filled with the nerve agent sarin at the Eastern Ghouta area, just outside Damascus. Within minutes, more than fourteen hundred civilians, including hundreds of children, began convulsing, choking, and foaming at the mouth, then died, of suffocation. President Obama reacted to the atrocity—which not only crossed but obliterated his self-described “red line” for taking action in the Syrian civil war—by having the U.S. military draw up a plan to destroy Assad’s small Air Force. Then, after deliberating with his inner circle, Obama called off the attack, citing a lack of congressional authorization and of international support. He later said that he was proud of having defied the pressure to look strong.

Unfortunately, the subsequent deal struck by the United States and Russia to remove Assad’s chemical-weapons stockpiles was full of loopholes, weakly enforced, and ultimately circumvented by Syrian and Russian deception. The lesson that Assad seemed to draw from Obama’s lonely act of self-liberation was that the West would not interfere the next time he gassed his own people. Last April, Assad used sarin on Khan Sheikhoun, a rebel-held town in northern Syria, killing at least seventy. President Trump’s advisers found it difficult to focus his attention on the enormity of the act, until his daughter Ivanka, after seeing pictures of dead children with foam around their lips and nos-

trils, spoke to him. The President ordered fifty-nine Tomahawk cruise missiles to be fired at the base from which the gas attacks had been launched. It was the first direct American strike against the Assad regime since the start of the war, in 2011, and Trump was widely praised. The next day, Syrian planes took off from the same base and bombed more civilians. Trump never followed up, and the war went on.

Almost exactly a year later, on April 7th, chemical weapons—chlorine and perhaps even stronger agents—again rained death on Eastern Ghouta, asphyxiating more than forty civilians in the town of Douma. The President threatened air strikes and warned Moscow to stay out of the way. “Get ready Russia, because they will be coming, nice and new and ‘smart!’” he tweeted. “You shouldn’t be partners with a Gas Killing Animal who kills his people and enjoys it!” Syria and

Russia, of course, say that the reports from Douma are fake news.

Poison gas, which kills with particular cruelty and indiscriminateness, has been internationally outlawed since shortly after the First World War, but in Syria it has become a conventional weapon. (Human Rights Watch has confirmed more than fifty government attacks.) Assad regularly uses chlorine for tactical advantage, and it works—the attack on Douma, coming at the end of two months of bombardment, forced rebels to surrender one of their last important strongholds. But he is also making a point: he is showing Syrians that he will do whatever it takes to hold on to power, that they are helpless, that no one will come to their aid.

Who can argue otherwise? Most of the gas attacks have gone unremarked upon in the outside world, unless they result in horrible pictures, and in those cases the Western response has been so uncertain that it has only encouraged Assad to keep going. Whether the American President is a judicious rationalist who cares about international law and disdains the cowboy image or an impulsive narcissist who is indifferent to every norm and just wants to look tough, the images from Syria are the same.

Trump is in an especially bad position to respond to these atrocities. Unlike every other President since Jimmy Carter, he doesn’t even offer human rights the compliment of hypocrisy. His foreign policy is simple: might makes right. He has championed brutal rulers, like the Philippine President, Rodrigo Duterte, and the Saudi royal family; shrugged



at genocidal killings in Burma; and pushed our military to use levels of violence that have sent civilian casualties in Syria, Iraq, and Afghanistan soaring. Under Trump, it is nearly impossible for refugees from the Syrian civil war to find a haven in this country. John Bolton, his new national-security adviser, describes international organizations and treaties as threats to U.S. sovereignty. On what ground can the Administration punish Assad for defying an international weapons ban and killing civilians?

Seven years of indecision have left us the weakest outside power in the war. Russia and Iran have committed fighters, weapons, aircraft, and a readiness to justify any inhumanity and tell any lie on behalf of their client in Damascus, and now Assad is close to the ultimate Pyrrhic victory. Turkey, defying American pleas, is waging a brutal campaign against the Kurdish People's Protection Units, our only reliable partner and the ground

force largely responsible for crushing the Islamic State. U.S. diplomacy was never aligned with the leverage in Syria that comes with force, and now we have no diplomacy at all. Any action that Trump takes will be feckless at best and possibly disastrous—triggering conflict with Russia, or the war with Iran that Bolton and others want—for there is no strategy to guide it except to “bomb the shit out of them” and get out. Even a joint attack with European allies would be empty without a larger effort to negotiate an end to the war.

A few days before the latest gas attack, the President declared victory over the Islamic State and announced that the two thousand U.S. troops in Syria would soon come home. Maybe he will have them march down Pennsylvania Avenue, past his reviewing stand, in the military parade planned for later this year. Trump had nothing to say about the fate of the Syrian Kurds and our other partner, the

Free Syrian Army, or about the possible return of ISIS, or about the regional ambitions of Russia and Iran. The announcement came as a surprise to his generals. After nearly two decades of inconclusive wars in collapsed states, against elusive enemies backed by complex arrays of actors, our military leaders no longer think in terms of victory parades. They use phrases like “staying in the game” and “pursuing your objectives.” They are far too wised up to suit their shallow, fragile, ignorant Commander-in-Chief.

Trump's taunts and reversals of the past week are the product of a character that we know too well. They also reflect deep American frustration with the limits of our power to win these wars or to end them. Hitting Assad now might bring a momentary sense of just deserts, but there is nothing to be proud of in Syria, and no American solution—not even for the gassing of children.

—George Packer

VOCATIONAL STUDIES ANGEL IN HASTINGS



Josh Max is a name that turns up in your e-mail in-box, sometimes with a video attached. The video might be a business proposition, in the form of him performing, on a portable keyboard, a few verses he's written to the tune of Billy Joel's “Just the Way You Are.” In place of the opening line, “Don't go changing,” he sings your name. He's sitting next to an old stove. He has messy peroxide-blond hair, a tight red T-shirt, and a wild look in his eyes.

So you'd think, when other e-mails arrive saying he's going to be in the city and would like to pick you up near your apartment in a fancy car and drive you to a graveyard, that you might come up with an excuse not to. But the videos are funny. He's persistent. And he says he'll be driving a Rolls-Royce or a Lamborghini. If you've never been in a car like that, this could be your chance.

On the appointed afternoon, you meet him on the street. He's driving a Mercedes-Maybach S560. (He couldn't get hold of

the Rolls or the Lambo.) He opens the back door. He wants you to have the experience. He gets in front and starts driving north. The contrast between the back seat's spacious, buttery interior and the driver's livery (T-shirt, worn jeans, jean jacket) is sharp enough to make you wonder if the car is stolen.

But it's not. Max, it turns out, tends many lines—musician, writer, photographer, ordained minister, and figure model—but his most remunerative is as a test driver and reviewer, for magazines, of expensive automobiles. He has been doing this for eighteen years—fifty-two cars a year. The manufacturers deliver the cars to him and he drives them around. He'd driven the Maybach to Bellmore, on Long Island, and was now taking it up the Saw Mill to the Westchester Hills Cemetery, in Hastings-on-Hudson, to visit his father's grave—a favorite test-driving destination.

The Maybach pulled up, scattering a rafter of wild turkeys. A footstone read “Stanley P. Friedman. 1925-2006.” “We buried him with a cup of coffee, mismatched socks, the *Times*, and a cigar,” Max said. Friedman was a writer and a photographer, and a Second World War B-17 bombardier who'd survived thirty-six missions over Europe. “He never talked about it,” Max said.

“We had a difficult relationship. When I changed my name to Max, in 1993, my dad said, ‘Fuck you.’ I went to fat camp when I was eleven. I got out of special ed at thirteen and drifted through high school. They thought I was retarded. But I learned to sing and play entire catalogues of music. I don't read music, but I have a savant's memory for lyrics and melodies.”

Max has put this talent to great use through the years—in a prog-rock band called Rage, a hybrid cover act (Elvis Prestello and the Distractions), a Nick Drake tribute orchestra, and a lounge-a-billy ensemble that he christened Josh Max's Outfit. There were memorable gigs but never a lot of cash.

In 2000, Max became the automobile critic at the *News*. Life was grand: “Jaguar would call and say, ‘What do you want?’ and they'd bring it to me the next day.” Bentley flew him to Beijing; Bugatti had him test-drive a two-and-a-half-million-dollar Vitesse. But that racket, like so many, got tight. He lived for a while in Park Slope, then Inwood, and then, finally, in a Winnebago, parked on the Upper West Side, not far from where he'd lived as a child. The neighborhood rebelled and, eventually, he had to split town for Philadelphia, then Colorado. “I'm so fucking

broke,” he said. On this occasion, Mercedes had flown him to New York from his temporary perch in Longmont. “But I have no permanent home now, really,” he said. “My stuff’s in storage in Manhattan and Philly.”

He performs up and down the Front Range, mostly solo: “It’s rare there to find people who can sing harmony. And they don’t really get my references to ‘The Honeymooners’ or ‘The Godfather.’” All-request solo-piano sets have him doing lots of Billy Joel. He has a gimmick, on vocals and guitar, where he strings together snatches of sixty-four Beatles songs, in six minutes. His current show, called “Binge Mode,” has him in Rollerblades, performing on a circular saw. “The noise gets their attention,” he said. He also has a regular gig as a nude model for art students at C.U. Boulder: “I name the poses so I can remember them: the Pelican, the Bela Lugosi, the Shoveller, the Pugilist.” He’s working on a memoir called “Help Wanted.”

“Where to now, sir?” he asked. He was headed eventually to New Jersey to take his mother bowling. She is ninety-four. “I speak to her every day,” he said. But first he piloted the Maybach to a coffee shop in a nearby mini-mall. A young man was sitting out front, writing on a laptop he’d plugged into his car. He said that he was driving around the country with a mutt named Bolt and blogging about it. His motto was: “Be silly, find joy, live in the moment.” He and Max talked for a bit. It felt like a meeting of two angels.

—Nick Paumgarten

PAPERWORK GETTING IN



Adversity can inspire great art, but it can also be a time suck. For more than twenty years, Matthew Covey has been helping musicians and other artists deal with government paperwork. He’s an immigration fixer; his firm, CoveyLaw, handles some twenty-five hundred visas every year, in affiliation with Tamizdat, a nonprofit whose mission



And, just like that, Facebook is giving us ads for used cars, optometrists, and couples counselling.”

is to promote cultural exchange. The name is a variant of “samizdat” (“self-published”), the Soviet term for clandestinely distributed dissident literature. “‘Tam’ means ‘over there,’” Covey explained the other day. “The stuff that’s taken across the border.”

Covey, who is fifty, is a tall, cheerful Minnesotan. “I wanted to be a hermit for a really long time,” he said. “But then in grad school I studied post-colonial literary theory.” In 1992, after the Berlin Wall came down, he and a girlfriend took university gigs in Slovakia. “We found this really great indie-rock punk scene there,” he said. “I wound up starting a band, which was way more interesting than teaching. Kind of damaged-art-noise math rock.”

The band didn’t last; neither did the relationship. Covey moved to Dublin, then to Amsterdam, where he ran the Knitting Factory’s European booking agency. He dabbled in publicity; he managed the Klezmatics. “But there wasn’t any good system for affordably getting artists into the U.S.,” he said. In 1998, he and some friends launched Tamizdat; after 9/11, visa applicants faced a much stricter level of scrutiny. “We kind of drew straws as a board, and I drew the short one,” he said. “So I wound up having to go to law school.”

With Trump’s travel ban—in each of its iterations—Covey’s mission has

assumed even greater urgency. His firm takes those cases pro bono. “At the consular stage, there’s definitely some confusion coming down from the Administration about how rigid to be,” he said. Earlier this year, he tried to bring in a group of Syrian dancers. The State Department said no to a member of the troupe. “Totally a bummer,” Covey said. “I had some Scandinavian clients, and they were, like, ‘Oh no, are we not getting in?’ And I said, ‘No, you’re *Danish* jazz musicians.’”

Translating arcane immigration policy for aspiring rock stars and global-citizen d.j.s can be trying. On one form, applicants are asked whether they’ve ever committed genocide. “It pushes people’s patience,” Covey said.

The other night, Covey hosted a workshop called “Navigating the Labyrinth” at his office building, in Dumbo. He wore a plaid shirt, jeans, and black boots; he has glasses and a graying goatee. About fifty artists gathered in a meeting room with a small disco ball dangling from the ceiling. A golden retriever greeted them at the door. “We once had a dog act write us about getting visas,” Covey recalled. “We wrote back, ‘We assume that you’re talking about the trainer?’” Nope. He grinned. “Dogs don’t need visas.”

He went on, “All these laws have to do with labor policy. They’re to protect

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American artists from”—he leaned into a microphone—“*you guys*.” He pulled up a PowerPoint. “The Department of Homeland Security’s idea of what’s ‘culturally unique’ is, unsurprisingly, not very sophisticated. In our office, we have the Funny Costumes and Weird Instruments Rule: if you’re wearing something weird and playing an instrument that can’t be bought at Guitar Center, then you’re probably good for a P-3 visa.”

An actor asked about travel flexibility. “I think Rod Stewart has been on an O-1 visa for years,” Covey replied. “Because he doesn’t want to get a green card and he tours all the time, and he wants to spend his summers in the South of France, or whatever.”

Parham Haghighi, a pianist, has an O-1 visa, but he’s from Iran, so he can’t fly in and out as he pleases. “This is not the best place to live,” he said. “But it’s better than where I came from.”

Clicking ahead, Covey advised, “You’re going to have to get creative. And by creative I don’t mean fraudulent. You can’t do what a lot of artists do, which is make up a bunch of stuff and put it in your petition. Because what Homeland Security has started to do is *call* those venues to check.” (This elicited an ominous “Oooh.”)

In closing, Covey assured the artists that they could follow up about their particulars. His office has a hot line. He described a sample call: “‘The band is coming in from Toronto, and everyone but the drummer is here.’” The crowd murmured. “It’s always the drummer.”

—Betsy Morais

OVER THE TOP BEDAZZLED



For the past six years, the designers Domenico Dolce and Stefano Gabbana have staged biannual presentations of their haute-couture, or Alta Moda, collections. The extravagant events, in which the designers show custom-made, one-of-a-kind pieces for both women and men, have until now taken place largely in Italian resort towns. But on a recent Friday hundreds

of Dolce & Gabbana clients descended on New York for the first-ever Alta Moda event in the United States—four days that kicked off at the main branch of the New York Public Library with an exhibit of the company’s high-jewelry, or Alta Gioielleria, line.

The library’s entrance hall—usually frequented by frazzled-looking graduate students, puffy-coated tourists, and homeless people seeking shelter—had been transformed. Enormous sprays of blossoming plum branches loomed everywhere; in a tribute to the location, oversized faux-medieval books lay open on tables; and a series of vitrines displayed opulent, one-off trinkets.

The Dolce & Gabbana woman can be defined by her willful rejection of the well-known Coco Chanel edict—preferring to put on rather than take off one final accessory before leaving the house—and the almost comically ornate jewelry on display echoed this attitude. A pair of earrings were composed of kittens perched on pavé balls, batting at pearl orbs dangling from diamond-flecked hearts. A book-shaped pendant was studded with diamonds and garnets and topped by a chunky ruby; hung on a sturdy chain, not unlike that worn by Sid Vicious in his heyday, it bore the hard-to-argue-with legend “Love Is Beauty.”

At 7:50 P.M., harried staffers were still bustling around, positioning jewels on Picasso-esque busts commissioned from the American artist Nick Georgiou, whose medium—appropriately or not, given the location—is repurposed books. The library had been kept open until six. Only then were the three hundred Dolce & Gabbana workers able to spring into action. “We were waiting for everyone to put their books down, pencils down, exit the library in single file,” a publicist said. She looked tired. The event had been in the works for a year. At eight, a Verdi aria boomed from speakers, marking the evening’s start. “*Cominciare!*” the publicist said with a short laugh.

The guests began to arrive—most of them Alta Moda enthusiasts who’d travelled from countries as far-flung as China, Russia, and Brazil—and the hall was quickly filled by a scrum of intricately shod, gem-adorned, heavily perfumed clients. The looks were gaudy and dramatic. There were at least



Sarah Jessica Parker and Domenico Dolce

a dozen glittering Coachella-gone-Baroque flower crowns in the room, some flounces and some trains, hats with veils, and colorful fur stoles, not to mention bejewelled corsets. The clients mingled over flutes of pink Cristal, served by handsome waiters in maroon livery.

Domenico Dolce, bald and bespectacled, wearing gold-embroidered loafers with a velvet dinner jacket of the same shade as the waiters’ bobbed and weaved among the crowd—posing for pictures, dispensing hugs, and passing around drinks. A jovial group of four women from Hong Kong swept him up for a selfie. One of them, Karen Suen, a jewelry designer, who wore a flowered gown with a plunging neckline and chandelier earrings, had been an Alta Moda client for two years. “Luxury!” she said. “It’s one of a kind!”

The evening had the feel of a summer-camp reunion. “It’s like a big family,” Veronica Chaves, who had flown in from Paraguay, said. She wore a white gown under a structured bolero busy with sparkly peppers and hearts, a tiara perching on her pale Renaissance-style ringlets. “Wearing Dolce & Gabbana makes you feel like you’re a queen inside,” she said. A potential hazard—two clients wearing the same dress—had to be averted, she cautioned, by consulting with the company in advance. “Every girl has her personal help,” she explained. (Clients also communicate with one another via a special WhatsApp account.) Chaves’s husband, who represents the Toyota company in Paraguay, was standing quietly by her

side, his dark suit punctuated by a pair of sparkly shoes.

After dinner, served at tables groaning under bushels of peonies, platters of strawberries, and ornate candelabra, the actress Sarah Jessica Parker led a charity auction with the help of Adrien Meyer, from Christie's. Parker had on a turquoise turban and a gold Alta Moda dress. The auction benefitted the New York City Ballet and ROC United, an organization that is dedicated to raising the wages of restaurant workers. Modelling a set of aquamarine-and-diamond earrings, bracelet, and necklace that were to be auctioned, Parker worked the crowd, coaxing guests to bid. "Tonight is not Alta Moda," Dolce cried. "It's Altissima! Too much!"

Rob Arnott, a gray-haired entrepreneur from Newport Beach, California, who sat beside his tiara-wearing Russian wife, Marina, bid aggressively, inspiring hoots and slightly feral applause. He ended up buying all the lots, including Parker's golden gown—which the designers had at first been reluctant to part with—for a little more than half a million dollars.

"Domenico and Stefano, can you throw in the dress?" Parker had asked earlier, attempting to solicit a steeper bid.

"No, no, no!" Dolce had at first answered, with a laugh. "I'm Catholic—no naked!"

—Naomi Fry

LEGACY DEPT. VERY UNIQUE



When her phone rang that day, Leah Nanako Winkler was broke. She'd come to New York on a bus, a decade earlier, with forty-five hundred dollars that she'd earned by selling her eggs to a fertility clinic, and now she was thinking about taking a part-time job as a dog groomer because she couldn't afford to both pay her rent and do the only work she wanted to do: write plays. "I saw that an unknown number was calling my phone, and I automatically assumed it was a telemarketer," she said recently. "So I answered the phone

by saying, 'I don't have any money.'"

But the caller was Tim Sanford, the artistic director of Playwrights Horizons, and he told Winkler that she'd been chosen as the first recipient of the Mark O'Donnell Prize, for "an emerging theater artist in recognition of her or his talent and promise." The prize came with twenty-five thousand dollars. Once Winkler got over the shock, she bought a desk.

The prize was named for a playwright, poet, novelist, cartoonist, and general-purpose humorist. He wrote for "Saturday Night Live," in the eighties, and he was an occasional contributor to this magazine, but commercial success eluded him, or he eluded it, until the theatre producer Margo Lion asked his agent, "Do you think Mark O'Donnell could write the book for a musical?" The musical was "Hairspray." O'Donnell shared a Tony with his co-writer, Thomas Meehan, and a few years later they adapted the play for film and wrote the book for a second musical, "Cry-Baby." Prosperity didn't visibly change him, however. His twin, Steve—who for years was David Letterman's head writer—said recently that, "Hairspray" notwithstanding, his brother never had more than one belt. "He owned two pairs of scuffed shoes, which even in middle age he referred to as his 'gym shoes' and his 'good, school shoes,'" Steve said. "Despite my offers to treat, he never had a cell phone."

Mark died in 2012, at the age of fifty-eight, after collapsing in front of his apartment building, on the Upper West Side. Recently, Steve donated Mark's "Hairspray" royalties in perpetuity to the Actors Fund, to endow the prize and to support other fund activities, including addiction-and-recovery services. (O'Donnell's death was at least partly alcohol-related.) The gift and the prize were announced during a private ceremony at what is now the Mark O'Donnell Theatre, at the Actors Fund Arts Center, in Brooklyn.

"As kids, we were identical enough to swap classes and hornswoggle adults in general," Steve said during the ceremony. "But I have to tell you, not then, not now, was there anybody who was like Mark O'Donnell. He was unique enough to carry the prohibited modifier: Mark was *very* unique." The actress

Miki Yamashita and the director Doug Hughes—who first put on an O'Donnell play when the two were Harvard undergraduates—joined Steve in reading three of Mark's pieces, among them "Manhattan Zen," a sequence of koan-like reflections on city life: "A run-over rat. Good! Still . . ."; "The neighbor who needs voice lessons is taking them."

"I was born first," Steve said afterward. "One day, in grade school, I told him, 'I'm the original, and you're the copy'—and he came back instantly with 'You're the rough draft, and I'm the new, improved version.' He was very fast. He was like a little adult when we were kids—and then, in a sort of strange switch-around, he was very childlike when he was actually a grownup."

Leah Winkler never met her benefactor, but, eerily, the first play she had anything to do with, in high school, was an adaptation of Molière's "Les Fourberies de Scapin," co-written by him. "I was a wordless gendarme, but that play was what made me fall in love



Mark and Steve O'Donnell

with the experience of theatre," she said. When Steve met her, he gave her copies of several of Mark's plays, and she said, "Oh, I've read them."

"That made me feel great on Mark's behalf," Steve recalled. "Leah's take on the world is very much like his. What she does is write characters that are true to their own selves, so that, when they speak, they say the kinds of dopey things that those people really would say, and that makes you laugh. She told me that she doesn't think of her plays as funny, but to me they're hilarious—like Mark's."

—David Owen

THE MARASCHINO MOGUL

After the bees turned red, Arthur Mondella's cherry empire revealed its secrets.

BY IAN FRAZIER



In the basement, police discovered a hydroponic system for cultivating marijuana.

Arthur Mondella is mourned. Up until the moment of his death, on February 24, 2015, he ran his family's company, Dell's Maraschino Cherries, in the Red Hook section of Brooklyn. His daughters Dana Mondella Bentz and Dominique Mondella, who run the company now, miss him every day. They remember him in their prayers and wish he could see how they've done with the business. Their great-grandfather Arthur Mondella, senior, and their grandfather Ralph founded it in 1948. Dell's Maraschino Cherries processes and sells nothing but cherries—about fourteen million pounds a year—from its single Red Hook factory. Dana, the president and C.E.O., is thirty, and Dom-

inique, the vice-president, is thirty-two.

One might not expect that Mondella's death also would have saddened many of New York City's beekeepers, but it did. People in the beekeeping community, or their bees, had crossed paths with Mondella in 2010, less than five years before he died. In fact, the complications in Mondella's life that led to his demise had a minor but significant bee component. The first small signs that all was not right with him arrived buzzing in the air. Though circumstances put Mondella and the bees on opposite sides of an issue, the beekeepers still speak admiringly of him, and express regret at his unhappy end.

The summer of 2010 was the hottest ever recorded in the city. By July,

heat reflected from the pavement had scorched the leaves of street trees, creating a false, uncolorful fall. In gardens, blossoms dried and withered, and the weeds by highway entrances took on the appearance of twisted wire. As summer progressed, to add a further touch of the apocalyptic, bees returning at the end of the day to hives in Red Hook began to glow an incandescent red. Some local beekeepers found the sight of red bees flying in the sunset strangely beautiful. All of them had noticed that their honey was turning red, too.

What next? they wondered. Bees go through a lot. Colony-collapse disorder—the decimation of entire hives—has been a worrisome problem worldwide. Pesticides, parasites, lack of flowers and other forage, erratic weather, and disease have caused drastic declines in bee populations. Hornets sometimes get into a hive and eat bees, honey, honeycombs, and all. Because the red bees were city bees, nobody took the sudden change in the color of their honey as a promising development.

Until March of that year, it had not been legal to keep bees in the city. A few beekeepers had evaded the ban by camouflaging their hives with faux-brick contact paper or otherwise making them blend in with the rooftops. The outlaws got a kick out of defying former Mayor Rudolph Giuliani, who had initiated the ban. Immediately after the Board of Health voted to lift it, the number of beekeepers multiplied. According to David Selig, a restaurateur who began keeping bees on the roof of his Red Hook apartment building in 2006, the number of hives in the area went from about three to more than a dozen. In the summer's unprecedented heat, water and nectar became harder to find.

At Added Value Farms, a public garden and composting site in Red Hook, Tim O'Neal, who teaches biology in middle school and at Brooklyn College, looked into the problem. O'Neal also keeps bees and writes a blog, Boroughbees. In it he speculated that the red honey might be connected to the nearby service depots for M.T.A. buses, and to a substance called ethylene glycol. Bees, pets, and children

have been known to sample motor fluids that contain ethylene glycol, because it tastes sweet. The results are sometimes fatal. He thought the bees might be bringing back spilled transmission fluid or antifreeze from the depots, and he advised his fellow-beekeepers not to taste any red honey until it had been tested. Cerise Mayo, a food and farm consultant who kept bees both in the garden and on Governors Island, just off the Red Hook shore, wondered why her island bees, separated from land by six hundred yards of water, were also producing red honey.

No one is sure who first began to think of the cherry factory. Bees were observed flying in its direction and visiting puddles of red juice around it on the sidewalk. In early September, O'Neal took chunks of honeycomb from hives in and near the garden, put them in fifty-millilitre sample tubes, and mailed them to the state apiculturist, in Albany, for testing. About a month later, he received the results: the honey tested positive for F.D.&C. Red No. 40, a food-safe dye, which is an ingredient of the maraschino syrup used by the Dell's factory.

In November, the *Times* broke the story, which ran on the front page, under the headline "In Mystery (and Culture Clash), Some Brooklyn Bees Turn Red." Cerise Mayo was quoted, voicing her distress that her bees were getting their honey from the syrup. Because her name sounded possibly made up, and her first name means "cherry" in French, a *Times* researcher had called her to make sure she was real. The story considered the problem in the context of the gentrification of Red Hook, with the factory standing for the old neighborhood and the beekeepers for the new. The idea of the red bees somehow clicked with readers, and scores of news outlets picked the story up. David Selig, whom it also mentioned, turned on his computer the morning the story came out and found "three thousand e-mails—from people I'd never heard of and from everybody I ever knew."

The *Times* story contained no quotes from Arthur Mondella, who had not returned phone calls asking for comment. It noted that Mondella

had been in touch with Andrew Coté, the founder of the New York City Beekeepers Association, to try to find a solution. Coté is the most famous beekeeper in New York. He keeps bees at several city sites, including on the grounds of the U.N., and sells New York City honey at the Union Square Greenmarket. He is a handsome, hazel-eyed man of French-Canadian parentage, with a suave black beard going gray. Coté's life has included many adventures, such as hanging upside down nineteen stories above Times Square to remove a swarm of bees from a window washer's stanchion with a special low-suction bee-vacuuming device he built himself, and securing hives on a roof at the request of Secret Service agents who planned to position snipers there and did not want any bees getting into a sniper's ear.

"The red honey tasted terrible, by the way," Coté told me one afternoon at his market stall. "It was sickly sweet, kind of metallic-tasting, and watery. But, after the story went all over the place online, I could've sold a ton of it. I had dozens of customers asking for it. And all that red honey ended up being thrown out, and those beekeepers lost a season of production." He showed me a few vials of the red honey he had kept as souvenirs.

"I really liked Arthur Mondella," Coté went on. "Arthur was genuine, a true Brooklyn guy, and he had that accent. Out of the blue, before the newspaper story, he got in touch about the bee situation and asked me to come to the factory. I didn't go until right after the story appeared. I knew there would be a lot of reporters around, so I asked if he could be there really early, like 5 A.M. He said, 'I will make it my business to be there.' I'll always remember that. I showed him how to put some screens up, make the lids of his bins tighter, control the spills. It was not a difficult adjustment at all, and we solved the problem. Afterward, I sent him an invoice for my services, he paid it, and that was that. Throughout the whole thing he was a gentleman."

No other beekeepers dealt as extensively with Mondella; all were grateful for his levelheaded response.

"We had been legal for less than a year," Selig said. "He could've made a fuss about why he had to deal with all these local bees. We appreciated that his first reaction wasn't to call the exterminator."

Meanwhile, also taking an interest in the story, the authorities saw an opportunity. According to later news reports, there had been rumors starting in 2009 that Mondella was growing marijuana. Law enforcement hoped that the attention being directed at the cherry factory might reveal more about what went on inside it. Quiet inquiries were made about the factory's floor plan.

Arthur Ralph Mondella was named after his grandfather Arthur and his father, Ralph. The family came from Naples, though Ralph was born in America. In Italy, Arthur, senior, had been a baker, and he wanted to get out of that business because he did not like working seven days a week. He and Ralph began making maraschino cherries in a small factory on Henry Street, in Carroll Gardens. The cherries, which traditionally embellish ice-cream sundaes and cocktails, were not steeped in maraschino, the Italian wild-cherry liqueur. (Since Prohibition, most maraschino cherries have not contained maraschino.) Instead, the Mondellas used a secret recipe involving sugar, citric acid, red coloring, and a curing process that never subjected the fruit to hot water. The cold-water-only approach preserves the cherries' crunch, the family says. All of the production was small-batch and hand-done. The hours turned out to be just as long as those in a bakery.

Arthur, of the second American generation of the family, was born in 1957. He grew up in Bay Ridge, attended Xavierian High School, and got a full scholarship to New York University. After graduating with a degree in finance he went to Wall Street, where he found a job with an investment firm. He did not want to work in the cherry factory at all, but in 1983 his father had a heart attack and Arthur set aside his financial career to take over the company.

Arthur, senior, was long dead by

then. When Arthur, the grandson, examined with an ex-Wall Streeter's eye the company he had inherited, he saw room for improvement. In the nineteen-seventies it had moved from Carroll Gardens to Dikeman Street, in Red Hook. Mondella set about expanding that location into two adjacent buildings, and eventually the factory occupied a total floor space of thirty-eight thousand square feet. He scaled up what had been essentially a mom-and-pop operation; his mother and his sister, Joanne, worked there, too, but he ran the show, increasing production capacity and acquiring large-volume food-service clients. In 2014, he made a seven-million-dollar investment in automation so that one day the place would "run itself," as he told his daughters.

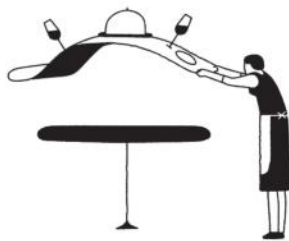
Despite automating, he wanted to keep his human workforce intact. By all accounts, he cared about his employees. Lots of ex-offenders had jobs at Dell's. The Red Hook Houses, a nearby low-income housing project, supplied him with workers who needed the paycheck. Mondella was known for giving salary advances, and loans whose repayment was not vigorously pursued. He hired a homeless man, provided him an advance for a deposit, and let him use a company truck to move into a new apartment. Gang tattoos could be seen on the muscular, maraschino-red-stained arms of guys on the factory floor.

The most commonly used news photo of Mondella shows him leaning into a cherry-processing machine, small and serious-looking behind the mass of bright-red cherries in the foreground. He is wearing a white lab coat, and a plastic shower cap covers his hair. ("A terrible picture of him," his daughters say.) He was a slim man, not tall, with dark eyes and a seamed, careworn face. He used "colorful language," according to several accounts. In his office he had a video monitor that showed the factory floor, and when he saw something going wrong he would appear suddenly and yell at those responsible. Unless he was meeting a customer, he dressed in jeans and a T-shirt, but he always wore white sneakers, and asked for new pairs every year from his family for Christmas. He

always ended up getting red stains on his white shoes, and he went through a lot of them.

He lived on Staten Island, in a distant neighborhood called Graniteville, until he and the girls' mother divorced. Dominique and Dana and their mother stayed in Graniteville, and Mondella moved back to Brooklyn, where he eventually married a Ukrainian woman. They had a daughter, Antoinette, who is more than twenty years younger than her half sisters. Later Mondella divorced again and moved in with his new girlfriend. But during all this time he spent most of his life at the factory.

Dominique and Dana both went to Moore Catholic High School, on Staten Island, and then to St. John's University, where Dana got a degree in accounting and Dominique got a degree in finance. Mondella said that after college one of them had to work for him. Dominique had worked off and on at the factory since high school, doing many jobs, from billing customers to booking flights for her father's business trips. After she graduated, she went back to the company full time. Dana was hired at PricewaterhouseCoopers, the international accounting firm, and began a job at its midtown office right out of college, often putting in sixteen-hour days. She met a man in banking, Tom Bentz, and they married in 2013. He also works for the family company.



Dana and Dominique share an office next to the one that used to be their father's. Last year, I visited them there. Dominique is pretty and dark, Dana is pretty and blond, and both intensify their eyes with mascara. "My father was just a very, very smart man," Dominique told me. "He wasn't an engineer, he wasn't a mechanic, but the guys on the floor said that he could fix any machine himself. Like, I could ask him, 'Dad, how do I fix my phone,

how do I back it up?' and he knew. He would always introduce me to the latest technology."

Dana said, "He didn't have hobbies, he wasn't into sports. He was into movies, a movie buff. When we were little kids, my parents were divorced, so he would pick us up, and we would go to Blockbuster, and we would pick out a bunch of movies, and just watch movies. He used to cook these huge barbecues for us, and I'd be, like, 'Dad, there's only four of us, we could have a meal like this for, like, twenty-five people.'"

"He was really specific in what he liked," Dominique said. "If he had a salad, it had to be only oil and vinegar on it, or if he wanted to have this brand of rice it had to be this specific brand of rice. Potato chips always had to be crinkle-cut."

Dana described going on an errand to buy her father bread. "So I drive from Staten Island to Brooklyn, to Thirteenth Avenue, where my dad wanted me to get the bread. So I call him. I'm, like, 'Dad, I can't find the bakery.' He's, like, 'What? You don't know where it is on Thirteenth Avenue?'—click!—so I found a bakery on Fourteenth Avenue. So I get to his apartment, he breaks the bread open, and he's, like, 'This isn't from Thirteenth Avenue! This is from Fourteenth Avenue!' And I'm, like, How does this guy even know?"

The smell of maraschino cherries, not unpleasant but eye-wateringly strong, fills the factory, and the floors remain sticky even though they're constantly mopped. Sometimes neighbors in apartments overlooking the building caught a few whiffs of marijuana along with the cherries. David Selig thought the smell of pot might be the result of workmen smoking it on their breaks. Later news stories said that a postal employee had told authorities that marijuana was being grown on the premises. But the police had failed to find suspicious signs. An increase in energy consumption consistent with the use of grow lights had not been detected, possibly because the factory had its own gasoline-powered generators, and a drug-sniffing dog had not been able

to discover a definitive scent of marijuana. Independently, environmental investigators, acting on a tip, began to look into possible violations in the dumping of wastewater from the cherry-manufacturing process into the sewer. Meanwhile, the Brooklyn D.A.'s office more or less forgot about the marijuana investigation.

Inquiry into what might be going on at the cherry factory did not proceed much beyond rumor and speculation. The heightened attention caused by the bee episode had increased the factory's visibility. In 2013, Brooklyn elected a new D.A., Kenneth Thompson, who set out to clean up pollution in the borough. His office decided to take a look at some stalled environmental cases.

"My father was a funny man in that he didn't share much," Dominique said. "That was just the way he was. We've come to find out only after his death what a pioneer he was in this business."

Dana said, "He was very private. We'd ask him questions when we were little and his response would be, 'Whaddya, writin' a book?'"

"Don't get us wrong—he wanted us to learn, but at the factory he would've wanted to make the decisions for us," Dominique said.

"The capacity that we're working at now, he would be so impressed," Dana said. "But I don't know if he would've been able to see that—not in his lifetime, because it wasn't in his nature to see it, to allow us to run with an idea, especially as it pertains to here. He was the type of person that did everything on his own."

"It's not that he didn't have confidence in who we were," Dominique said. "He knew that he raised two smart girls."

"A lot of Dominique's and my growth didn't occur until after his passing. Like, if my father were here, I would not be here. I would still be at PricewaterhouseCoopers doing audits."

"I think you would be here."

"Maybe down the road, but not this early. Our father could be really hard on you, but when he was nice you would forget about that. He gave us everything financially that we



"How long before the clinical trials are over?"

could've asked for, but we were not spoiled."

"Dana, see if you have the picture of you and him and Antoinette at the wedding."

"My dad gave me the most impressive, gorgeous wedding I could've ever asked for. It was a hundred and forty-five people, at Our Lady Queen of Peace in Staten Island, and we had the reception at the Palace, in Somerset Park, New Jersey. I wore a white silk dress. D'Pascual, at Nelson and Amboy on Staten Island, did my hair. I watch the video of the wedding sometimes and it's nice. My dad is in it."

"We were just very proud of him, proud of our parent."

When the raid finally happened, it was a surprise. On February 24, 2015, a Tuesday, during working hours, officers from the Department of Environmental Protection, the New York City Police Department, and the Brooklyn District Attorney's office came to the cherry factory with a warrant to search parts of the premises for evidence of illegal dumping of wastewater. A lawyer for the company later described the action as a "guns

blazing" raid, which it was not, but the officers did arrive in numbers. Their warrant hadn't allowed for the searching of Arthur Mondella himself. As the officers moved through his factory, he became more and more agitated. While examining some shelves, they found what appeared to be a false wall. They told him they were going to send for a warrant to search behind it. As they waited for the warrant, Mondella excused himself to use the bathroom. Once inside, he locked the door and would not come out.

The police tried to persuade him to unlock the door. He refused, and asked them to bring his sister, Joanne. They did. Through the door, he said to her, "Take care of my kids." Then he shot himself in the head with a .357 Magnum pistol he had been carrying in an ankle holster.

To have strangers going through his factory must have seemed, for such an inward and self-created man, as if invaders were rummaging around in his brain. The factory was his world, he had thought out everything in it—he was it. When he suddenly could not control what was occurring in it, or what was about to occur, he could

erase the nightmare only by erasing himself. Experience has shown that the revealing of a secret life can be a motivation for suicide. But nobody saw the catastrophe coming, or imagined the aloneness of this man.

"The day it happened, Dominique called me, and I was, like, 'What? What do you mean? Was he depressed?'" Dana said. "I mean, I didn't understand. Then all the news about the marijuana came out. We never knew."

"Reading the articles that came out, that was how we knew," Dominique said. "I guess he was protecting us."

"I remember I was actually out sick that day," Dana said. "And then I came here and I saw that there was a lot of police activity, and I didn't understand, because if somebody killed themselves why would there be this many police?"

Behind the false wall the officers discovered a ladder leading down to a large basement, twenty-five hundred square feet, and space for about a hundred marijuana plants in a well-set-up system of hydroponic cultivation under L.E.D. grow lights. They also found about a hundred pounds of harvested marijuana, a hundred and thirty thousand dollars in cash, and a

small office containing a desk with books on plant husbandry and a copy of "The World Encyclopedia of Organized Crime." In a garage area they came upon a collection of vintage cars, a Bentley and a Rolls-Royce among them, which suggested that Mondella led a flashier life when not at the factory. Later reports mentioned his use of cocaine, his boat, his lavish spending in restaurants, and his fiancée, a former *Penthouse* model.

Had Mondella lived, he could have gone to jail for two or three years; more likely, he would have received probation. The D.A. charged the company with criminal possession of marijuana in the first degree, a felony, and with failing to comply with laws relating to wastewater dumping, a misdemeanor. The company pleaded guilty to both charges and paid a fine of \$1.2 million. After that judgment, no further charges were filed. The D.A. did not want to destroy a successful local business that provided a number of Brooklyn residents with jobs. Also, investigators had been unable to find evidence to prove that the marijuana was being sold, nor had they tried very hard to find such ev-

idence. The volume of the operation, obviously larger than was needed for personal use, implied that Mondella had been selling it. How, and to whom, and who helped him build the farm—who serviced the plumbing, the wiring, the grow lights—remained intriguing questions he was not around to answer.

In his will, Mondella left an estate that included \$8.5 million in cash, more than enough to cover the fine. Dana and Dominique received fifty-five per cent of the company between them; Joanne, their aunt, got twenty per cent; and twenty-five went to Antoinette, their half sister. The older daughters decided to take personal charge of the business they now controlled. After the news of the raid, some customers dropped Dell's for other cherry suppliers, but by travelling the country to meet with customers individually Dana and Dominique were able to keep most of them, and later persuaded a few who'd left to come back. Most of their large-volume restaurant chains stayed on.

A young employee, Joshua Sabino, had been hired by Mondella the day before the raid. Sabino was excited about his new job, but when he saw the police everywhere he figured that the factory would have to close. He had been grateful to Mondella for hiring him. "But the factory closed for only two days," he told me. "They kept all the workers. And we even got paid for the days it was closed. I felt like Mr. Mondella was still taking care of me."

In May, 2016, Dana and Dominique sued the city for recklessness and negligence in the death of their father, saying that the raid to search for environmental violations had been only a ruse, that officers had obtained a warrant fraudulently, and that the police should have taken their father's gun from him to protect him from harming himself. Their lawyer, Richard Luthmann, of Staten Island, characterized the raid as a "cowboys and Indians" operation that got out of hand, and asked for fifty million dollars in damages and penalties. The following April, Judge Leo Glasser, a federal judge in the Eastern District, issued



"Then I thought, I should get real and lower my expectations, and that's when I met Evan."

a ruling in which he called the claims “preposterous” and threw the lawsuit out. The officers had no duty to protect Mondella from suicide, Glasser said. The warrant did not call for searching him, he was never in police custody, and no one could have reasonably expected that he might shoot himself over a misdemeanor environmental violation.

When I called Luthmann to ask about Glasser’s verdict, he sounded undaunted and said he planned to appeal. Glasser is a famous judge, ninety-four years old, a Bronze Star veteran of the Second World War. “He’s a wonderful judge, don’t misunderstand me,” Luthmann said. “But he’s the same guy who put John Gotti away, and I think he may be a little hard on Italians, and suspect they’re all criminals and in the Mafia. Frankly, I believe this is a decision that could be dangerous to police officers, because here’s this potential suspect who was allowed to walk around with a weapon while the investigation of his premises was going on.” He added, “If the D.A.’s office had done their homework, they could’ve found out that this man was licensed to carry a firearm.”

As for Mondella’s possible criminal ties, his ex-brother-in-law, Salvatore Capece, the former husband of Joanne, served five years in jail for money laundering, and Salvatore’s brother, Vincent Capece, had a rap sheet for drug offenses that went back to the nineteen-eighties. In 1994, Vincent participated in a smuggling ring that brought seventeen million dollars’ worth of marijuana from California to New York in sealed metal containers, a crime for which he was given a thirty-three-month sentence. Mondella and Salvatore Capece had been known to spend time together. Glasser’s decision made no reference to these circumstances.

Despite Mondella’s last words to his sister, she was not involved with her nieces’ assuming control of the company, or with their later decisions about it, and evidently this did not sit well with her. In March, 2017, Joanne sued Dana and Dominique for mismanaging the company, pushing her out, slashing her salary, and ceasing to pay for her leased Mercedes-Benz.

Joanne asked that her previous position, salary, and perks be restored to her, or that the company be sold, so she could receive her twenty per cent. Her mother—Dana and Dominique’s grandmother Antoinette—also sued them, asking for restoration of the company car that she had been provided with for more than fifty years, which they had taken away. Commenting on these suits, Luthmann told the *News* that under Dana and Dominique the company was doing “better than ever,” and that this family squabbling was a shame. He added, “It was Joanne and Antoinette that fired the first shot.”

Though I never met Luthmann in person, I found him helpful on the phone. A follow-up story of December 16, 2017, made me wonder if I had been talking to the same guy. It said that Richard Luthmann—identified as a Staten Island attorney; yes, it was the same guy—and two other men had been arrested for wire fraud, kidnapping, extortion, brandishing a weapon, identity theft, and money laundering. There were eleven charges in all. The alleged scheme involved a scrap-metal dealer co-conspirator; the sale to foreign customers of shipments of scrap metal that turned out to contain mostly concrete blocks; a blind client of Luthmann’s whose identity the conspirators used in order to set up bank accounts and launder almost half a million dollars obtained by this fraud; and the later kidnapping of the scrap-metal dealer for the purposes of extorting an extra ten thousand dollars from him at gunpoint.

Luthmann is a big man who appears in many photos wearing a red bow tie, a tight-fitting powder-blue suit, and round glasses. He once challenged a rival in a lawsuit to settle the issue through trial by combat. Luthmann spent twelve weeks in jail before his release on bail a few weeks ago. He has denied all the charges and is awaiting a May trial. During his incarceration, the deadline lapsed for filing an appeal of Dana and Dominique’s suit against the city. Luthmann is currently banned from practicing

law, so another lawyer will take over the intra-family lawsuits, which are still pending.

Every summer, Mondella used to host a barbecue for his employees, providing all the food and doing the cooking for everyone. There was no barbecue the summer after he died, but in 2016 the tradition resumed, close to his birthday, June 25th, and in 2017 the company continued it. On the day in July when the event took place, I wandered around Red Hook in the morning, checking out the beehives at Added Value Farms, then sheltering under a tent there during a downpour. The rain slackened to a drizzle. Dana was sending me e-mails saying



the barbecue was being delayed until the rain stopped. Red Hook is a waterfront place, with the Statue of Liberty a near neighbor across the harbor, and a high, oceanic sky that’s larger because none of the buildings are tall. I strolled past businesses that are part of the neighborhood’s current incarnation—Fleisher’s Craft Butchery, Widow Jane Distillery, Steve’s Authentic Key Lime Pie, Flickinger Glassworks. The hot, humid air smelled of the open water it was blowing in from.

Finally the rain quit and patches of blue sky opened up. On Dikeman Street’s wide sidewalk, next to a delivery gate for the cherry factory, workmen were sitting on folding chairs beside a table laid with sodas and picnic paraphernalia. Tom Bentz, Dana’s husband, was cooking burgers, hot dogs, and marinated chicken breasts on a gas grill the size of a small bus. It had different grilling venues, and ventilator hoods, and shelves, and control knobs of varying sizes. Someone’s CD player was blasting rap music with lyrics that did not mess around. Tom, Dana, and Dominique wore black T-shirts printed with the Dell’s logo in white. Most of the workmen wore sleeveless shirts, and all were red-spattered and generally a sunburn shade of maraschino red.

Leon Perry, who began his job at the factory after his release from prison twenty years ago, told me how Mondella had loaned him money for rent

when he started out. Minnow Johnson, a mechanic, said Mondella had funded his studies at trade school. Arthur Casey remembered when Mondella paid for his three-hundred-dollar cab ride home one night when he had to work late.

Afterward, during the cleanup, Leon Perry pointed to the grill, which Tom was scraping with a metal spatula, and said, "This was his grill." For a moment it was as if Mondella himself had materialized there on Dikeman Street, analogized by this amazing piece of equipment.

Tom looked at the sky. "It cleared up," he said. "That was Dana and Dominique's father looking down." The guys posed for a group photo, smiling, with red arms around one another's shoulders, and then went back to work.

I asked Dominique and Dana why they had decided to take over running the company themselves. After all, they could have assembled a committee of consultants, asked for input, done a search for a plant manager, let someone else direct the business day to day. Or they could have sold it; recent years have seen the buyout of other maraschino-cherry companies by large corporations like Green Giant Foods.

"This is all our father left," Dana explained. "He didn't have a home. His cars were taken away by the investigation. I didn't get to sort through his things. He lived with his girlfriend, and it's not really my place to go in to her apartment and start grabbing things. What I would've loved would've been, like, even if I had a pair of cufflinks so I had something that's tangible of his. The only tangible thing that we have left of him is this place."

"This was his life. It was his blood, sweat, and tears," Dominique said.

"When my father came, the business was failing, and he took a risk, he put everything he had into it, and he made it so much better, a real success. When we came, it looked as if it was going to fail, because of everything that was happening around it. And we took a risk."

"We put every inch of ourselves into it."

"I lost my father, and I had to come back two days later and go to work.

You didn't have time to mourn. He wouldn't've even have wanted that. He wouldn't have wanted us to dwell. He would've been, like, 'Get up, let's go, whaddya doin'?'"

"It's definitely been very stressful, but I always think positive," Dominique said.

"I'm more realistic," Dana said. "I try not to think about the factory twenty-four seven, but I'm dreaming about it at night, seeing the cherries, the different sizes, in my head. We sell five different sizes, from small to medium to large to extra-large to colossal, with stems and without, so that's ten different kinds—"

"Also crushed cherries, and cherries in halves," Dominique said. "And in different colors. Not only red."

"It's a statistic that a lot of family businesses don't survive past the second generation," Dana said. "My dad was in the third generation, and now we're the fourth. You can make it work, it's just a lot of hard work and dedication."

"Growing up, he always taught us—like, be responsible," Dominique said. "We just knew we had to step up."

Tim O'Neal, who helped solve the red-honey mystery, tends his hives on Saturdays at Added Value Farms. The bizarre events of the summer of 2010 have never happened again. I found him smoking his bees—making them disoriented with smoke from a small hand-held device—in order to do hive maintenance. O'Neal is a tall, dark-haired man from Troy, Ohio, and he has the accent of that part of the country. "I felt pity when I heard Mondella died," he said. "What a terrible situation. He was a good neighbor. We all live in a community together—who cares if some dude is growing marijuana? It's practically legal now anyway. I'm sure he was putting out good product. I was shocked the situation turned out so badly."

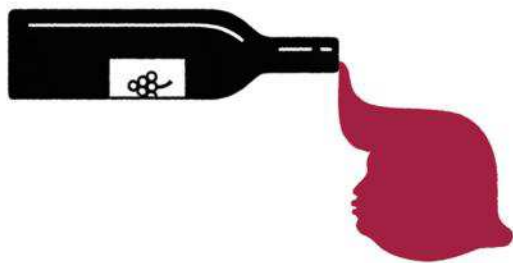
The fame of Andrew Coté, the beekeeping expert who helped Mondella, has only grown. Lately he has branched out into other countries, riding a surge of interest in beekeeping worldwide. The last time I talked to him at his stall in Union Square, tour organizers from China stopped by to discuss arrangements for his upcoming lectures there.

He said that reporters had called him when Mondella died. "It was a dark hour. Arthur was not looking to hurt anybody. He had honesty and integrity, and he made it clear, when dealing with the red-honey problem, that he cared about the bees' welfare." Coté also pointed out, apropos of Tim O'Neal's original ethylene-glycol theory, that recently some hives in East New York had produced a green and poisonous honey whose main ingredient turned out to be antifreeze.

David Selig, the restaurateur who had been the factory's nearest beekeeping neighbor, has created one hit restaurant after another. A recent success, Rockaway Taco, has inspired him to move from Red Hook to that distant part of the city. Selig is another Canadian offspring, a wiry man with dark, Gallic features and a greeter's easy manner.

"I have great admiration for Arthur, and a lot of empathy," Selig said. "He was in his factory morning and night; at one time or another I've slept in every one of my businesses. And after years in restaurants, which in New York City have to be the most regulated industry on the planet, I know what he was facing. If the city and the feds had started in with him, they'd still be on him to this day. He grew up in this regulatory world and I'm sure he knew how it would go down. What he did was unthinking, like pushing a friend out of the way of a speeding car. He had that boyhood type of loyalty. He gave himself up for his family."

Cerise Mayo, who was one of the first to notice the red honey, no longer keeps bees. She has dark, curly hair and brown eyes, and she wears clothes featuring patterns from nature, such as a shirt with swallows flying wingtip to wingtip. After the summer of 2010, she gave her bees away. The thought of how difficult it is to know what they'll get into in an urban environment discouraged her. If she ever keeps bees again, she wants to be out in the country, in a more pastoral setting. "I felt horrible when I learned of Mr. Mondella's death," she said. "How hard it must have been to carry all the weight he had to deal with. I even saw some follow-up stories that seemed to be blaming his death on the bees. That's crazy. The bees were just behaving like bees." ♦



TASTING NOTES FOR A TEETOTALLING PRESIDENT

BY ANN BEATTIE

1. The mouthfeel of the Stormy Daniels “60 Minutes” interview is complex, gradually revealing itself in a mellow bitterness that still has so much more to tell. With hints of self-knowledge paired with humor, graced by silvery-pink Underside of the Ash Tree lipstick, the **2018 Stormy** holds delicious allure, offering undertones of raspberries, as its mystery resolves on the tongue with crumbling sweetness and a sparkle of brilliance not often seen in so humble a grape.

2. The terroir was propitious for this year’s **Banished Secretary 2018**, whose taste lies primarily beneath the surface, its low notes shivering with incautious power, owing to the convergence of double allegations whose force pairs them in an assertive way. Though some find it too strong, others will take pleasure in the sour-grape aftertaste of this forceful wine, whose bruised-eye glossiness would best be paired with artisanal young-barnyard-animal cheese.

3. An impressive, bold taste can be savored as the enigmatic qualities inherent in our **2018 Special Prosecutor** (limited quantities) cause smacking of the lips and eye rolls of delight comparable to what one feels when viewing the stars on a winter evening in Moscow. A sturdy wine whose flavors unfold quickly, like collapsed tents, **Special P** astonishes with a minerality rarely perceived outside the graveyard.

4. The taste of **Melania 2018** holds its own among other fortified wines.

The major notes stride forward after a slight delay, as the wine descends down the palate. One is sure to be captivated by this meticulously enhanced wine, a true sparkling diamond. Chef has created a special recipe to pair with the vintage, available on the vineyard’s Web site (search “Your hide is cooked”), with locally sourced “smashed” potatoes underlying deliciously larded meat.

5. **Mar-a-Lago 2018** contains amusingly golf-ball-size notes of sour cherries, intermingled with predominant notes of private-plane fuselage, grass clippings, and Florida lemons. It is best drunk early, like a Beaujolais Nouveau, and you are advised to act quickly, as some experts believe that this wine may soon go out of production.

6. As growers know, the shifting exigencies of our environment sometimes make it necessary to widen our categories of appreciation. It has been said, with regard to the **Vin Américain 2018**, that even the archangels might be counted on to blow their trumpets (no pun intended) in surprise. With an approach as brash as a wildfire, this wine’s tastes of charred almond intermix with flavors of gravel and redwood and top notes of burned squirrel, providing the perfect accompaniment to barbecued ribs slathered with our special sauce (ketchup “blood” with smoked woodland mushrooms). This exquisite sauce is equally good with rabbit, quail, elephant, and donkey. ♦

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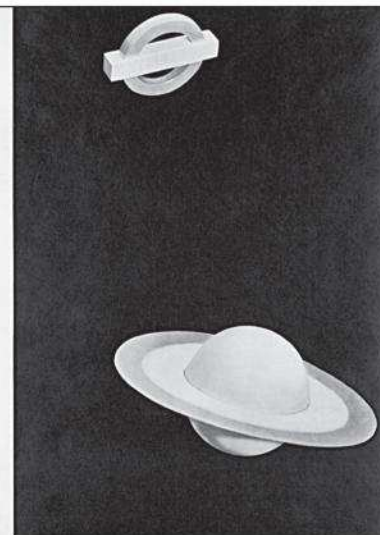
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A CRITIC AT LARGE

ANYBODY THERE?

Fifty years later, the tedium and the triumph of "2001: A Space Odyssey."

BY DAN CHIASSON



The power of Stanley Kubrick's classic is bound up with the story of its making.

Fifty years ago this spring, Stanley Kubrick's confounding sci-fi masterpiece, "2001: A Space Odyssey," had its premières across the country. In the annals of audience restlessness, these evenings rival the opening night of Stravinsky's "Rite of Spring," in 1913, when Parisians in osprey and tails reportedly brandished their canes and pelted the dancers with objects. A sixth of the New York première's audience walked right out, including several executives from M-G-M. Many who stayed jeered throughout. Kubrick nervously shuttled between his seat in the front row and the projection booth, where he tweaked the sound and the focus. Arthur C. Clarke, Kubrick's col-

laborator, was in tears at intermission. The after-party at the Plaza was "a room full of drinks and men and tension," according to Kubrick's wife, Christiane.

Kubrick, a doctor's son from the Bronx who got his start as a photographer for *Look*, was turning forty that year, and his rise in Hollywood had left him hungry to make extravagant films on his own terms. It had been four years full of setbacks and delays since the director's triumph, "Dr. Strangelove, Or: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb." From the look of things, the Zeitgeist was not going to strike twice. A businessman overheard on his way out of a screening spoke for many: "Well, that's one man's opinion."

"2001" is a hundred and forty-two minutes, pared down from a hundred and sixty-one in a cut that Kubrick made after those disastrous premières. There is something almost taunting about the movie's pace. "2001" isn't long because it is dense with storytelling; it is long because Kubrick distributed its few narrative jolts as sparsely as possible. Renata Adler, in the *Times*, described the movie as "somewhere between hypnotic and immensely boring." Its "uncompromising slowness," she wrote, "makes it hard to sit through without talking." In *Harper's*, Pauline Kael wrote, "The ponderous blurry appeal of the picture may be that it takes its stoned audience out of this world to a consoling vision of a graceful world of space." Onscreen it was 2001, but in the theatres it was still 1968, after all. Kubrick's gleeful machinery, waltzing in time to Strauss, had bounded past an abundance of human misery on the ground.

Hippies may have saved "2001." "Stoned audiences" flocked to the movie. David Bowie took a few drops of cannabis tincture before watching, and countless others dropped acid. According to one report, a young man at a showing in Los Angeles plunged through the movie screen, shouting, "It's God! It's God!" John Lennon said he saw the film "every week." "2001" initially opened in limited release, shown only in 70-mm. on curved Cinerama screens. M-G-M thought it had on its hands a second "Doctor Zhivago" (1965) or "Ben-Hur" (1959), or perhaps another "Spartacus" (1960), the splashy studio hit that Kubrick, low on funds, had directed about a decade before. But instead the theatres were filling up with fans of cult films like Roger Corman's "The Trip," or "Psych-Out," the early Jack Nicholson flick with music by the Strawberry Alarm Clock. These movies, though cheesy, found a new use for editing and special effects: to mimic psychedelic visions. The iconic Star Gate sequence in "2001," when Dave Bowman, the film's protagonist, hurtles in his space pod through a corridor of swimming kaleidoscopic colors, could even be timed, with sufficient practice, to crest with the viewer's own hallucinations. The studio soon caught on, and a new tagline was added to the movie's re-

PHOTOFEST

designed posters: "The ultimate trip."

In "Space Odyssey: Stanley Kubrick, Arthur C. Clarke, and the Making of a Masterpiece," the writer and filmmaker Michael Benson takes us on a different kind of trip: the long journey from the film's conception to its opening and beyond. The power of the movie has always been unusually bound up with the story of how it was made. In 1966, Jeremy Bernstein profiled Kubrick on the "2001" set for *The New Yorker*, and behind-the-scenes accounts with titles like "The Making of Kubrick's 2001" began appearing soon after the movie's release. The grandeur of "2001"—the product of two men, Clarke and Kubrick, who were sweetly awestruck by the thought of infinite space—required, in its execution, micromanagement of a previously unimaginable degree. Kubrick's drive to show the entire arc of human life ("from ape to angel," as Kael dismissively put it) meant that he was making a special-effects movie of radical scope and ambition. But in his initial letter to Clarke, a science-fiction writer, engineer, and shipwreck explorer living in Ceylon, Kubrick began with the modest-sounding goal of making "the proverbial 'really good' science-fiction movie." Kubrick wanted his film to explore "the reasons for believing in the existence of intelligent extraterrestrial life," and what it would mean if we discovered it.

The outlines of a simple plot were already in place: Kubrick wanted "a space-probe with a landing and exploration of the Moon and Mars." (The finished product opts for Jupiter instead.) But the timing of Kubrick's letter, in March of 1964, suggested a much more ambitious and urgent project. "2001" was a science-fiction film trying not to be outrun by science itself. Kubrick was tracking NASA's race to the moon, which threatened to siphon some of the wonder from his production. He had one advantage over reality: the film could present the marvels of the universe in lavish color and sound, on an enormous canvas. If Kubrick could make the movie he imagined, the grainy images from the lunar surface shown on dinky TV screens would seem comparatively unreal.

In Clarke, Kubrick found a willing accomplice. Clarke had served as a radar

instructor in the R.A.F., and did two terms as chairman of the British Interplanetary Society. His reputation as perhaps the most rigorous of living sci-fi writers, the author of several critically acclaimed novels, was widespread. Kubrick needed somebody who had knowledge and imagination in equal parts. "If you can describe it," Clarke recalls Kubrick telling him, "I can film it." It was taken as a dare. Meeting in New York, often in the Kubricks' cluttered apartment on the Upper East Side, the couple's three young daughters swarming around them, they decided to start by composing a novel. Kubrick liked to work from books, and since a suitable one did not yet exist they would write it. When they weren't working, Clarke introduced Kubrick to his telescope and taught him to use a slide rule. They studied the scientific literature on extraterrestrial life. "Much excitement when Stanley phones to say that the Russians claim to have detected radio signals from space," Clarke wrote in his journal for April 12, 1965: "Rang Walter Sullivan at the New York *Times* and got the real story—merely fluctuations in Quasar CTA 102." Kubrick grew so concerned that an alien encounter might be imminent that he sought an insurance policy from Lloyd's of London in case his story got scooped during production.

Clarke was the authority on both the science and the science fiction, but an account he gave later provides a sense of what working with Kubrick was like: "We decided on a compromise—Stanley's." The world of "2001" was designed ex nihilo, and among the first details to be worked out was the look of emptiness itself. Kubrick had seen a Canadian educational film titled "Universe," which rendered outer space by suspending inks and paints in vats of paint thinner and filming them with bright lighting at high frame rates. Slowed down to normal speed, the oozing shades and textures looked like galaxies and nebulae. Spacecraft were designed with the expert help of Harry Lange and Frederick Ordway, who ran a prominent space consultancy. A senior NASA official called Kubrick's studio outside London "NASA East." Model makers, architects, boatbuilders, furniture designers, sculptors, and

painters were brought to the studio, while companies manufactured the film's spacesuits, helmets, and instrument panels. The lines between film and reality were blurred. The Apollo 8 crew took in the film's fictional space flight at a screening not long before their actual journey. NASA's Web site has a list of all the details that "2001" got right, from flat-screen displays and in-flight entertainment to jogging astronauts. In the coming decades, conspiracy theorists would allege that Kubrick had helped the government fake the Apollo 11 moon landing.

Kubrick brought to his vision of the future the studiousness you would expect from a history film. "2001" is, in part, a fastidious period piece about a period that had yet to happen. Kubrick had seen exhibits at the 1964 World's Fair, and pored over a magazine article titled "Home of the Future." The lead production designer on the film, Tony Masters, noticed that the world of "2001" eventually became a distinct time and place, with the kind of coherent aesthetic that would merit a sweeping historical label, like "Georgian" or "Victorian." "We designed a way to live," he recalled, "down to the last knife and fork." (The Arne Jacobsen flatware, designed in 1957, was made famous by its use in the film, and is still in production.) By rendering a not-too-distant future, Kubrick set himself up for a test: thirty-three years later, his audiences would still be around to grade his predictions. Part of his genius was that he understood how to rig the results. Many elements from his set designs were contributions from major brands—Whirlpool, Macy's, DuPont, Parker Pens, Nikon—which quickly cashed in on their big-screen exposure. If 2001 the year looked like "2001" the movie, it was partly because the film's imaginary design trends were made real.

Much of the film's luxe vision of space travel was overambitious. In 1998, ahead of the launch of the International Space Station, the *Times* reported that the habitation module was "far cruder than the most pessimistic prognosticator could have imagined in 1968." But the film's look was a big hit on Earth. Olivier Mourgue's red upholstered Djinn chairs, used on the "2001" set, became a design icon, and the high-end

lofts and hotel lobbies of the year 2001 bent distinctly toward the aesthetic of Kubrick's imagined space station.

Audiences who came to "2001" expecting a sci-fi movie got, instead, an essay on time. The plot was simple and stark. A black monolith, shaped like a domino, appears at the moment in prehistory when human ancestors discover how to use tools, and is later found, in the year 2001, just below the lunar surface, where it reflects signals toward Jupiter's moons. At the film's conclusion, it looms again, when the ship's sole survivor, Dave Bowman, witnesses the eclipse of human intelligence by a vague new order of being. "2001" is therefore only partly set in 2001: as exacting as Kubrick was about imagining that moment, he swept it away in a larger survey of time, wedging his astronauts between the apelike anthropoids that populate the first section of the film, "The Dawn of Man," and the fetal Star Child betokening the new race at its close. A mixture of plausibility and poetry, "real" science and primal symbolism, was therefore required. For "The Dawn of Man," shot last, a team travelled to Namibia to gather stills of the desert. Back in England, a massive camera system was built to project these shots onto screens, transforming the set into an African landscape. Actors, dancers, and mimes were hired to wear meticulously constructed ape suits, wild animals were housed at the Southampton Zoo, and a dead horse was painted to look like a zebra.

For the final section of the film, "Jupiter and Beyond the Infinite," Ord-

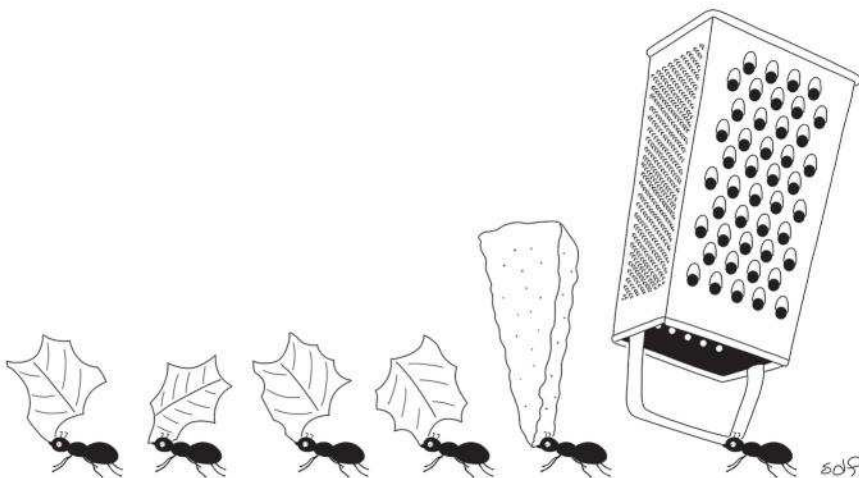
way, the film's scientific consultant, read up on a doctoral thesis on psychedelics advised by Timothy Leary. Theology students had taken psilocybin, then attended a service at Boston University's Marsh Chapel to see if they'd be hit with religious revelations. They dutifully reported their findings: most of the participants had indeed touched God. Such wide-ranging research was characteristic of Clarke and Kubrick's approach, although the two men, both self-professed squares, might have saved time had they been willing to try hallucinogens themselves.

The Jupiter scenes—filled with what Michael Benson describes as "abstract, nonrepresentational, space-time astonishments"—were the product of years of trial and error spent adapting existing equipment and technologies, such as the "slit-scan" photography that finally made the famous Star Gate sequence possible. Typically used for panoramic shots of cityscapes, the technique, in the hands of Kubrick's special-effects team, was modified to produce a psychedelic rush of color and light. Riding in Dave's pod is like travelling through a birth canal in which someone has thrown a rave. Like the films of the late nineteenth century, "2001" manifested its invented worlds by first inventing the methods needed to construct them.

Yet some of the most striking effects in the film are its simplest. In a movie about extraterrestrial life, Kubrick faced a crucial predicament: what would the aliens look like? Cold War-era sci-fi offered a dispiriting menu of extraterrestrial avatars: supersonic birds, scaly monsters, gelatinous blobs. In their ear-

liest meetings in New York, Clarke and Kubrick, along with Christiane, sketched drafts and consulted the Surrealist paintings of Max Ernst. For a time, Christiane was modelling clay aliens in her studio. These gargoyle-like creatures were rejected, and "ended up dotted around the garden," according to Kubrick's daughter Katharina. Alberto Giacometti's sculptures of thinned and elongated humans, resembling shadows at sundown, were briefly an inspiration. In the end, Kubrick decided that "you cannot imagine the unimaginable" and, after trying more ornate designs, settled on the monolith. Its eerily neutral and silent appearance at the crossroads of human evolution evokes the same wonder for members of the audience as it does for characters in the film. Kubrick realized that, if he was going to make a film about human fear and awe, the viewer had to feel those emotions as well.

And then there is HAL, the rogue computer whose affectless red eye reflects back what it sees while, behind it, his mind whirrs with dark and secret designs. I.B.M. consulted on the plans for HAL, but the idea to use the company's logo fell through after Kubrick described him in a letter as "a psychotic computer." Any discussion of Kubrick's scientific prescience has to include HAL, whose suave, slightly effeminate voice suggests a bruised heart beating under his circuitry. In the past fifty years, our talking machines have continued to evolve, but none of them have become as authentically malicious as HAL. My grandfather's early-eighties Chrysler, borrowing the voice from Speak & Spell, would intone, "A door is ajar," whenever you got in. It sounded like a logical fallacy, but it seemed pleasantly futuristic nonetheless. Soon voice-command technology reached the public, ushering in our current era of unreliable computer interlocutors given to unforced errors: half-comical, half-pitiful simpletons, whose fate in life is to be taunted by eleven-year-olds. Despite the reports of cackling Amazon Alexas, there has, so far, been fairly little to worry about where our talking devices are concerned. The unbearable pathos of HAL's disconnection scene, one of the most mournful death scenes ever filmed, suggests that when we do end up with humanlike computers, we're going to have some



wild ethical dilemmas on our hands. HAL is a child, around nine years old, as he tells Dave at the moment he senses he's finished. He's precocious, indulged, needy, and vulnerable; more human than his human overseers, with their stilted, near robotic delivery. The dying HAL, singing "Daisy," the tune his teacher taught him, is a sentimental trope out of Victorian fiction, more Little Nell than little green man.

As Benson's book suggests, in a way the release of "2001" was its least important milestone. Clarke and Kubrick had been wrestling for years with questions of what the film was, and meant. These enigmas were merely handed off from creators to viewers. The critic Alexander Walker called "2001" "the first mainstream film that required an act of continuous inference" from its audiences. On set, the legions of specialists and consultants working on the minutiae took orders from Kubrick, whose conception of the whole remained in constant flux. The film's narrative trajectory pointed inexorably toward a big ending, even a revelation, but Kubrick kept changing his mind about what that ending would be—and nobody who saw the film knew quite what to make of the one he finally chose. The film took for granted a broad cultural tolerance, if not an appetite, for enigma, as well as the time and inclination for parsing interpretive mysteries. If the first wave of audiences was baffled, it might have been because "2001" had not yet created the taste it required to be appreciated. Like "Ulysses," or "The Waste Land," or countless other difficult, ambiguous modernist landmarks, "2001" forged its own context. You didn't solve it by watching it a second time, but you did settle into its mysteries.

Later audiences had another advantage. "2001" established the phenomenon of the Kubrick film: much rumored, long delayed, always a little disappointing. Casts and crews were held hostage as they withstood Kubrick's infinite futz-ing, and audiences were held in eager suspense by P.R. campaigns that often oversold the films' commercial appeal. Downstream would be midnight showings, monographs, dorm rooms, and weed, but first there was the letdown. The reason given for the films' failures suggested the terms of their redemp-

tion: Kubrick was incapable of not making Kubrick films.

"2001" established the aesthetic and thematic palette that he used in all his subsequent films. The spaciousness of its too perfectly constructed sets, the subjugation of story and theme to abstract compositional balance, the precision choreography, even—especially—in scenes of violence and chaos, the entire repertoire of colors, angles, fonts, and textures: these were constants in films as wildly different as "Barry Lyndon" (1975) and "The Shining" (1980), "Full Metal Jacket" (1987) and "Eyes Wide Shut" (1999). So was the languorous editing of "2001," which, when paired with abrupt temporal leaps, made eons seem short and moments seem endless, and its brilliant deployment of music to organize, and often ironize, action and character. These elements were present in some form in Kubrick's earlier films, particularly "Dr. Strangelove," but it was all perfected in "2001." Because he occupied genres one at a time, each radically different from the last, you could control for what was consistently Kubrickian about everything he did. The films are designed to advance his distinct filmic vocabulary in new contexts and environments: a shuttered resort hotel, a spacious Manhattan apartment, Vietnam. Inside these disparate but meticulously constructed worlds, Kubrick's slightly malicious intelligence determined the outcomes of every apparently free choice his protagonists made.

Though Kubrick binged on pulp sci-fi as a child, and later listened to radio broadcasts about the paranormal, "2001" has little in common with the rinky-dink conventions of movie science fiction. Its dazzling showmanship harkened back to older cinematic experiences. Film scholars sometimes discuss the earliest silent films as examples of "the cinema of attraction," movies meant to showcase the medium itself. These films were, in essence, exhibits: simple scenes from ordinary life—a train arriving, a dog cavorting. Their only import was that they had been captured by a camera that could, magically, record movement in time. This "mov-

ing photography" was what prompted Maxim Gorky, who saw the Lumière brothers' films at a Russian fair in 1896, to bemoan the "kingdom of shadows"—a mass of people, animals, and vehicles—rushing "straight at you," approaching the edge of the screen, then vanishing "somewhere beyond it."

"2001" is at its best when it evokes the "somewhere beyond." For me, the most astounding moment of the film is a coded tribute to filmmaking itself. In "The Dawn of Man," when a fierce leopard suddenly faces us, its eyes reflect the light from the projection system that Kubrick's team had invented to create the illusion of a vast primordial desert. Kubrick loved the effect, and left it in. These details linger in the mind partly

because they remind us that a brilliant artist, intent on mastering science and conjuring science fiction, nevertheless knew when to leave his poetry alone.

The interpretive communities convened by "2001" may persist in pockets of the culture, but I doubt whether many young people will again contend with its debts to Jung, John Cage, and Joseph Campbell. In the era of the meme, we're more likely to find the afterlife of "2001" in fragments and glimpses than in theories and explications. The film hangs on as a staple of YouTube video essays and mashups; it remains high on lists of both the greatest films ever made and the most boring. On Giphy, you can find many iconic images from "2001" looping endlessly in seconds-long increments—a jarring compression that couldn't be more at odds with the languid eternity Kubrick sought to capture. The very fact that you can view "2001," along with almost every film ever shot, on a palm-size device is a future that Kubrick and Clarke may have predicted, but surely wouldn't have wanted for their own larger-than-life movie. The film abounds in little screens, tablets, and picturephones; in 2011, Samsung fought an injunction from Apple over alleged patent violations by citing the technology in "2001" as a predecessor for its designs. Moon landings and astronaut celebrities now feel like a thing of the past. Space lost out. Those screens were the future. ♦





The Rio Grande runs along Big Bend National Park, separating Mexico, on the right, from the United States, on the left.



A REPORTER AT LARGE

WATER AND THE WALL

*A river trip through the borderlands
that Trump wants to fence off.*

BY NICK PAUMGARTEN

A border wall would be devastating to life on both sides of an already threatened river.

PHOTOGRAPH BY GEORGE STEINMETZ

When Dan Reicher was eight, he became fixated on wolverines. He admired their ferocity but, because they were endangered, feared for their survival. While poring over a catalogue of outdoor gear, he came across a parka trimmed in wolverine fur. He was outraged. His mother, a schoolteacher, and his father, an ob-gyn, urged him to put his umbrage to good purpose, so he sent the gear company a letter. After some time, he received a reply: the company was discontinuing the parka. Had his protest made the difference? Probably not, but, still, he inferred that a citizen, even a little one, had the power to effect change. “Boy, was I misled,” he said recently.

Reicher, now sixty-one, is a professor at Stanford and the executive director of its Steyer-Taylor Center for Energy Policy and Finance. Previously, he led Google’s climate and energy initiatives and served in the Clinton Administration as an Assistant Secretary of Energy. He has spent most of his adult life trying to help humankind move past its reliance on fossil fuels. Under President Trump, conservationists have seen decades of gains rolled back in a matter of months. Still, Reicher, like so many environmentalists, goes grimly about his business.

Reicher’s real obsession is water. He grew up in Syracuse, paddling on polluted lakes, and liked to collect and test water samples. When he was eleven, his parents sent him to Ontario on a canoe trip with a drill sergeant who failed to bring an adequate supply of food. Reicher, getting by on wild blueberries and toothpaste, had never been and would never again be as hungry, but, even so, he loved the whole thing. For a couple of summers in his teens, he attended the Colorado Rocky Mountain School, in Carbondale, where a French champion of the new-fangled sport of white-water kayaking taught aspiring river-runners the eddy turn and the high brace. Reicher got to spend a week on the Green River, paddling through the vast Di-

nosaur National Monument. He was captivated by the journals of a predecessor there: John Wesley Powell, the Union Army major who lost an arm at Shiloh and later led the first expedition to navigate the length of the Grand Canyon. As an undergraduate at Dartmouth, Reicher joined the kayaking team and the Ledyard Canoe Club, which is named for John Ledyard, the eighteenth-century American explorer, who dropped out of Dartmouth after a year and paddled down the Connecticut River, from Hanover to the Long Island Sound, in a dug-out canoe fashioned from a tree he cut down on campus.

In the spirit of these forebears, in 1977 Reicher and some fellow-Ledyardians embarked on an expedition of their own. A classmate, Tony Anella, from Albuquerque, was preoccupied with his home-town river, the Rio Grande, and had determined that no one in documented history had navigated the river’s nearly two thousand miles, from source to sea. He planned to be the first. The students secured backing from the National Geographic Society, which, a dozen years before, had sponsored a Ledyard trip along the Danube. For course credit, Anella, a history major, would compile a history of water rights on the river, while the other principal, Rob Portman, an anthropology major (and now the junior United States senator from Ohio), would take on the subject of mass migration. Reicher, a biology major, would assess the water and whatever life could survive in it.



Generally, the storied river descents, like so many iconic American journeys, have tended to be those which run west, down from the Continental Divide to the sea. And, of those, the torrent that drains the far slope of the southern Rockies, the Colorado, seemed to draw the love and the lore—it had deeper cataracts, bigger flows, gnarlier rapids, bolder boatmen, and fiercer fights over dams and acre-feet.

The Rio Grande had neither a John Wesley Powell nor a Lake Powell. It is typically considered, by those of us

who don’t depend on it, little more than a boundary separating Mexico from Texas, a squiggly moat on a map. It represents a gateway to opportunity or escape for the migrants and fugitives, in life and in song, who cross it in the hope of a fresh beginning—a kind of baptism by border. Known south of the border as Río Bravo del Norte, and to the indigenous Pueblo people as P’Osoge, its various sections were given an array of now mostly forgotten names by sixteenth-century explorers—Río Caudaloso, Río de la Concepción, Río de las Palmas, Río de Nuestra Señora, Río Guadalquivir, Río Turbio, River of May, Tiguex River. The Rio Grande drops out of the San Juan Mountains, in southern Colorado, bisects New Mexico, north to south, and then, splitting El Paso and Ciudad Juárez, tacks southeast. The majority of its length, from El Paso to the Gulf of Mexico, with the S-turn of the Big Bend, forms the southern boundary of Texas, and of the United States. The river empties into the Gulf just past Brownsville, Texas. No part of the river is like any other. Typically, it is treated more as a managed scheme of discrete local parts—Taos Box, Elephant Butte Reservoir, Big Bend, Lower Canyons, Valle—than as an essential artery feeding a vast corner of our continent and a watershed connecting interdependent ecosystems, cultures, and nations.

Reicher, with Portman and Anella and another classmate, a photographer named Pete Lewitt, hiked down from the source, at Stony Pass, just east of Silverton, Colorado, and put in twenty-five miles later, below the first dam, in fiberglass kayaks, brittle precursors of today’s polyethylene creek boats. Two weeks later, they encountered their first great challenge, in the tricky rapids near Taos. The surge of snowmelt was greatly reduced by dams upstream. (And by drought: 1977 was the worst year, in terms of snowpack, in the past half century. The second worst? 2018.) The river was, in kayak-speak, bony. By the time they reached the confluence with the Santa Fe, below Cochiti Dam, there wasn’t much water left. Even forty years ago, the flow south of Albuquerque was so depleted by farmers and by the city’s sprawling

population that the kayakers had to divert to the network of irrigation ditches that run alongside the river. At one point, a farmer in an El Camino pulled up next to them, unloaded two water skis, strung a rope from the trailer hitch, and towed Reicher along the canal. “First time I ever water-skied with dust in my face,” Reicher said.

Farther downriver, in the muddy flats at the head of the Elephant Butte Reservoir, in southern New Mexico, the water would neither support their weight nor allow them to paddle, so they devised a method of pushing their boats with their hands and feet while lying on the stern. Crossing into Texas, where the river meets the Mexican frontier, the Ledyardians switched to bicycles and rode along paved roads until, a couple of hundred miles later, the Río Conchos, running out of the Mexican state of Chihuahua, replenished the ancient riverbed, so that they could saddle up their kayaks again. Because of upstream depletions, the Rio Grande is really two rivers: one that fizzles in southern New Mexico (the locals there refer to it as the Rio Sand) and one that begins in West Texas. In between is the puddled and trenched borderland east of El Paso and Juárez—the Forgotten Reach, which, prior to the big dams, had been regularly revived (and scoured) by seasonal floods from New Mexico. There had even been eels in Albuquerque—fifteen hundred miles upstream of the Gulf of Mexico.

The Dartmouth expedition, now five strong, made it through the deep canyons and riffles of the Big Bend and then entered the Lower Canyons, the river’s most remote leg, which Congress, a year later, designated part of the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System. The desert eventually gave way to a subtropical luxuriance of palms, broccoli farms, and citrus orchards, the riverbanks and wetlands teeming with wildlife. The birds and animals didn’t recognize the border. The people, though, were defined by it. The kayakers regularly encountered Mexicans crossing the river with burlap bundles. Near Eagle Pass, they came across a bloated male corpse, with a noose around the neck. (“We tried to report him, but neither side



was terribly interested,” Reicher recalls.) At night, burrowing into the invasive wild cane to make camp, they set off seismic sensors installed by the U.S. Border Patrol.

After four months on the river, they reached the Gulf. They posed on the beach, five gringos, tan and lean, brandishing the Ledyard flag. Relations among some of them had frayed, amid a clash of egos—endemic to such expeditions. Reicher and Anella have hardly spoken since. But the trip remains a highlight of their lives. To Anella, it was a religious experience. “One-half of the hydrologic cycle—it reached something deep in my soul,” he says. He likes to cite Ecclesiastes: “All streams flow into the sea, yet the sea is never full. To the place the streams come from, there they return again.”

Reicher prefers Heraclitus: “No man steps in the same river twice, for it is not the same river and he is not the same man.” Since 1977, he has been back to the Rio Grande six times; the river may have changed more than he has. Four years ago, a young newspaper reporter in San Antonio named Colin McDonald set out to duplicate the source-to-sea trip, using Reicher’s journals as a blueprint. He dubbed it

the Disappearing Rio Grande Expedition. He soon discovered that the river was in even worse condition than it had been forty years earlier. Groundwater depletion, suburban sprawl, periodic droughts (attributable, probably, to climate change): every year, people were asking more of less water. He wound up having to walk a third of the river’s length. Reicher, who had helped McDonald raise money and get attention for the trip, joined him for a couple of actual-water segments—in the Big Bend and then the last miles, where the river limps into the Gulf. When McDonald did a slide show in Albuquerque, Anella approached him afterward and said simply, “That was *my* trip.”

After Donald Trump was elected, he pursued his campaign promise to build a wall along the nearly two thousand miles of border between the United States and Mexico. The Rio Grande’s “disappearance” took on fresh meaning. As imagined, such an undertaking would be devastating to life along an already threatened river.

Having been determined by the 1848 peace treaty that ended the Mexican-American War, the border traces



"Thank God she was wearing a helmet."

the river's deepest channel—the thalweg—which, because the riverbed frequently shifts according to the water's whims, is in some respects notional. Of course, no one is proposing that a wall be built in the middle of the river, or for that matter on Mexican soil, even if Mexico is going to pay for it. So the wall would go on the American side, some distance from its banks—miles into U.S. territory, at times. It would cut people off from their own property and wildlife from the main (and sometimes the only) water source in a vast upland desert. The Center for Biological Diversity has determined that ninety-three listed or proposed endangered species would be adversely affected. The wall could disrupt the flow of what meagre water there is, upon which an ecosystem precariously depends. And it would essentially seal the United States off from the river and cede it to Mexico: lopping off our nose to spite their face. It would shrink the size of Texas.

There is also the matter of efficacy. The wall would probably delay a hypothetical crossing by a few minutes, depending on its design and the manner of the breach. There are videos of Mexicans deploying ladders, ramps, ropes, welding torches, and tunnels to get over, through, or under border

fences. (There are about seven hundred miles of fence already, most of it in California and Arizona.) For a great deal of its length, the river is insulated on both sides by hundreds of miles of desert—inhabitable terrain that does more to discourage smugglers and migrants than a wall ever could. (The vast majority of hard drugs intercepted on the southern border is coming through so-called points of entry—the more than forty official crossings—hidden in vehicles and cargo.) And, while the banks of the river, for much of it, are free of impediments, except for thick stands of invasive cane and salt cedar, which can make life miserable for the Border Patrol, about a hundred miles of it cut through deep canyons far more imposing and prohibitive to a traveler on foot than a slab of concrete or steel. The canyons don't require funding from Congress.

This winter, Reicher put together a trip on the Rio Grande, with American Rivers, an advocacy group, of which he's a board member, to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act, and to begin to articulate, in an informal but pertinent setting, a response to Trump's wall. (Last week, American Rivers, for the first time since 2003, included the

Rio Grande in its annual list of the ten most endangered rivers.) This wasn't so much an expedition as a floating Chautauqua, with a missionary bent. He and Bob Irvin, the president of American Rivers, invited me along. Among the guests were two grantees with dynastic connections to environmental conservation: Senator Tom Udall, Democrat of New Mexico, whose father, Stewart Udall, spearheaded the protection of vast tracts of American wilderness and was a crucial proponent of the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act; and Theodore Roosevelt IV, whose great-grandfather, the twenty-sixth President, used his bully pulpit, and hundreds of executive orders, to turn the federal government into a force for, and an enforcer of, land and wildlife conservation. Before American Rivers got involved, Reicher had invited Rob Portman, who has the kayak from the 1977 expedition mounted in his office on Capitol Hill, but his schedule was too tight, and he'd been back to the river a year earlier, with his family. "Last thing a Republican needs now is to be seen spending a week on a river with a bunch of tree huggers," Irvin told me with a chuckle.

I'd never given any thought to the Rio Grande, despite its being the fourth-longest river in the United States. My first river trip was a five-night commercial float, on rafts, on the Middle Fork of the Salmon, in Idaho's River of No Return Wilderness. It was 1985. I was a teen-ager, with my family and about twenty strangers—a group of gay men from Houston and New Orleans, and a biker hippie from Portola, California. The biker, who was a friend of one of the guides, went by Feets (he had got himself listed in the white pages as Amazing Feets) and spent his Middle Fork days aboard the supply boat, in jean cutoffs and a white tank top, rolling and smoking joints. I remember sitting on a sandbank one evening, after a consultation with Feets, watching the river flow—the molecules jostling past, toward the Main Salmon, the Snake, the Columbia, and the Pacific, and then up into the atmosphere and the jet stream and eventu-

ally, via cumulonimbus, back to the mountains upstream—and appreciating, really for the first time, the fact that this conveyor belt of snowmelt and runoff never stopped rolling, a quintessence of incessance unlike anything I could conceive of, except maybe time itself. Or an escalator. Then I wandered off in quest of some leftover Dutch-oven apple crisp.

Even in the clear-eyed light of day, the Middle Fork worked its magic. There was something addictive about the unfurling, around every bend, of new vistas. The fellowship, too: by the end of the trip, all of us, clients and guides, vowed to visit one another soon, making what I now know are routine pixie-dust promises that in this case were so unlikely to be kept that it took only a few days for the spell to wear off. (A river trip is a little like summer camp that way.) I passed through Portola a year later and found “Feets, Amazing” in the local phone book. No answer.

Soon afterward, I learned how to do an Eskimo roll, and spent a decade white-water kayaking wherever and whenever I could. Lehigh, Lochsa, Youghiogheny, Ocoee, Gallatin, Tohickon, Penobscot, Payette: the names of the rivers summon up boulder gardens, azure pools, high-speed surf waves, life-threatening keeper holes—and those mesmerizing cellophane stretches where the water, clear and unruffled, accelerates over a rocky bed, getting ever shallower, before dropping into the aerated tumult of a rapid. To safely navigate big rapids, and to play in them with some assurance, you have to acquaint yourself with a fundamental principle: water seeks its own level. This is why it flows toward the sea, why it churns back on itself when it drops steeply, and why, if you lean the wrong way crossing an eddy line, it flips your boat—and why, if you fail to roll up and have to swim, it fills your boat (and your sinuses) as it dashes you against the rocks. Whatever level the water is seeking, you are better off with your head above it.

Work, city life, injuries, and children put an end to my boating. But, like Ishmael, I intermittently get a strong urge to take to the ship. Several years ago, I joined a private—un-

guided—raft trip on the Colorado River, through the Grand Canyon, put together by a few friends, some of whom had guided on the river in their twenties. Most of us were strangers to one another, but the pixie dust was strong. Two weeks in the canyon, with no connection to the outside world. The rim the edge of your universe, the river your only way through it. Among the promises I made to myself, down on the Colorado—promises that were inevitably broken—was that I would spend a greater portion of my life, or what remained of it, on swift, wild, and scenic American rivers.

So I signed on to Reicher’s trip. At his urging, I started reading “Great River,” Paul Horgan’s *muy grande*

Pulitzer-winning account of the Rio Grande, which, like “2001: A Space Odyssey,” reaches about as far back as a history can. It begins:

Space.

Abstract movement.

The elements at large.

Over warm seas the air is heavy with moisture.

The guy was speaking my language.

This is why, after a five-hour evening drive from El Paso through the shimmering blood-meridian expanse of West Texas, then a morning of sorting gear, meeting and greeting, and bouncing in a shuttle van through the ocotillo-and-yucca high desert of Big Bend National Park, I found my

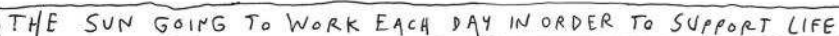


At the edge of this slough sat a flotilla of twelve canoes, one kayak, and a supply raft. The lead guide, John LeRoy, a ropy, leathery dude with a gray beard and ponytail, was busy rigging the boats. Eventually, he gathered everyone for an orientation speech—safety, paddling and rigging technique, chain of command. He brought up the urination routine (“Pee in the river, whenever possible. Dilution is the solution to pollution”), but said he’d address the poop question later. Something about LeRoy’s edgy forbearance seemed to say New York City, and, sure enough, he was from Elmhurst—né Jean-Yves, the son of French immigrants. His father had been a waiter in the theatre district. LeRoy had worked blue-collar jobs

We were a few miles upriver of Boquillas Canyon, where the river cuts through the limestone fortress of the Dead Horse Mountains, by the Sierra del Carmen. That's the stretch we were heading for—four days, three nights, just thirty-three miles, in one of the most protected sections of the Rio Grande. The water flow was low, the workload light, the dangers few, the rapids negligible. This was a commercial guided float trip, cosseted and catered. Still, we'd be out of touch and off the grid. Four days without cellular coverage can lead to palpitations and debilitating night sweats. So can scorpions and rattlesnakes.

was considered impregnable, by boat anyway. There is no record of anyone ever having navigated it when this territory belonged to Spain. In the nineteenth century, numerous survey parties, daunted by the prospect of big rapids and no escape, didn't venture past the entrance. Three Confederate deserters claimed to have floated from El Paso to Brownsville, in 1861, in a pair of lashed-together dugout canoes but left no description of the Big Bend canyons, which would have represented a noteworthy test. In 1899, a boating expedition led by Robert Hill, an officer for the U.S. Geological Survey, set out to explore the canyons. "Every bush and stone was closely scanned for men in ambush," he wrote afterward. The country apparently teemed with bandits, the most fearsome of them a Mexican named Alvarado, who was known as Old White Lip, because his mustache was half white and half black. The Mexicans on Hill's expedition were supposed to kill Alvarado if they encountered him, but, at some point, they floated right past him, without realizing who it was, as he watched from the bank with a baby in his arms. Maybe he'd shaved off the mustache. Hill and his men found the going in Boquillas less arduous than expected, and filled in a new section of the map.

All told, there were twenty guests



and four guides. Reicher, who had his daughter and his son along (one a recent graduate of Dartmouth, the other headed there next fall), made introductions. As people paired up, Udall, unaccompanied by staff or spouse, chose me as his stern man. He is sixty-nine years old, of medium build, and had on a long-billed sunhat, sunglasses, thick sunblock, a long-sleeved fishing shirt tucked into khaki-colored quick-dry pants, and Teva sandals: no Amazing Feets, my bow man. He had a Jimmy Stewart aw-shucks air about him and a way of working my first name into every other sentence, but he wasn't above having a beer on the water or sharing cold-eyed appraisals of his colleagues on Capitol Hill. He is a liberal-voting Democrat with a lifetime score of ninety-six per cent from the League of Conservation Voters, but has some sensitivity to the needs of constituents trying to make a living off the land in the arid West. He'd spent a lot of time outdoors through the years. He'd been an instructor for Outward Bound, in college, and every summer he spends a week or two backpacking in the wilderness of the Wind River Range, in Wyoming. (His cousin—and longtime travelling companion in the Winds—Randy Udall died there five years ago, on a solo hike.)

Udall began to tell the story, over his shoulder, of his family and its roots in the Church of Latter-day Saints. One great-grandfather, David King Udall, was a Mormon bishop and a polygamist, who went to prison for perjury. (He'd lied when Mitt Romney's great-grandfather was being investigated for polygamy; his bail was posted by Barry Goldwater's father.) A great-great-grandfather, John Lee, who had nineteen wives, was one of the leaders of the Mountain Meadows Massacre, in 1857, in which a Mormon militia murdered a party of settlers in southwest Utah; Lee was the only one executed for the crime.

The family eventually made its way toward the political mainstream, as the West fell under the sway of Washington. Mo Udall, Tom's uncle, was a liberal congressman who ran for President, in 1976. Mo's son, Mark, spent six years in the Senate. Tom's father,

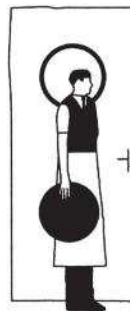
Stewart Udall, was Secretary of the Interior under Presidents Kennedy and Johnson. "L.B.J. bullied my dad," Udall said. "He considered him a Kennedy guy." (Stewart had supported Kennedy over Johnson in 1960.) "But my dad had a great relationship with Lady Bird." As a Mormon with deep roots in the Southwest and a dam-happy constituency at home in Arizona, Stewart Udall was constitutionally and politically inclined to develop natural resources, rather than preserve them. "I was born with a shovel in my hand," he liked to say. But his adventures outdoors and his friendship with Rachel Carson and other environmentalists made him increasingly receptive to opposing arguments, and he wound up presiding over the federal government's most prolific spree of land and species protection, including the Wilderness Act, the Endangered Species Preservation Act, and the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act.

The Senator and I were getting the hang of our boat. It was an Old Town canoe, almost seventeen feet long and piled high with gear. We were approaching the old mining village of Boquillas del Carmen, on the Mexican side. Udall called out "*Hola!*" to some men squatting on the bank with a skiff that they employed to ferry people back and forth across the river, at five dollars a head. The Boquillas Crossing, at a shallow and slack stretch of the river, has long been a port of entry. The Border Patrol shut it down in 2002, after the attacks of September 11th. This devastated the village, which, on the Mexican side, is about four hours away from the nearest paved road. In the absence of tourism, some hundred remaining residents scraped by for a decade. In 2013, the U.S. opened the crossing again, allowing Big Bend visitors to go over to Boquillas for the day or the night, and Mexicans to go to the other side to sell souvenirs—or to retrieve grazing cattle that might have strayed there.

A little farther downstream, a stretch of fast water steered the boats toward a cut bank and some strainers

(as midstream downed limbs and trees are called), and LeRoy pulled up on a gravel bar—Mexico—to supervise, while a *vaquero* in reflector shades and a backward ball cap sat sentry on a burro. "*Buenas tardes,*" the Senator said.

"Everyone has a river story," Udall told me. His had to do with a Grand Canyon trip he took with his father, when he was a teen-ager, in June, 1967.

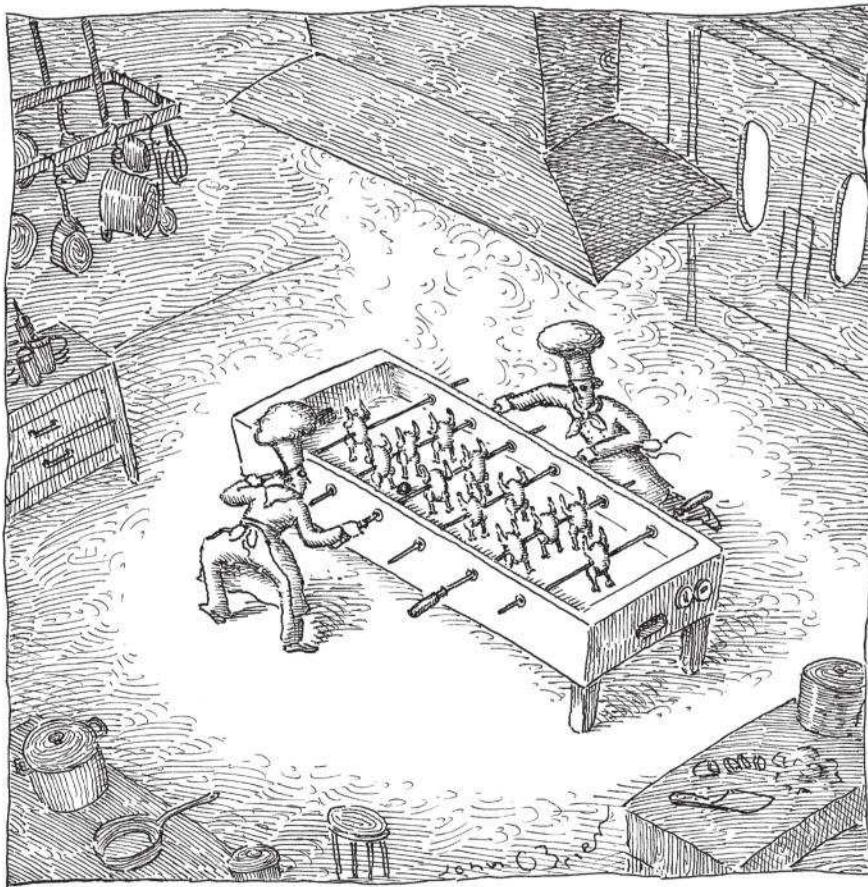


As a congressman from Arizona, and then as Interior Secretary, Stewart Udall had for many years supported two controversial projects in the Grand Canyon: proposed dams in Marble and Bridge Canyons, which would have turned long sections of the Grand Canyon into reservoirs. Eventually, Congress

killed the dams. Soon afterward, Udall and his family went on a raft trip in the Grand—what he called his "ride on the wild side."

Tom Udall told me, "My dad wanted, as he put it, to 'let the canyons speak for themselves.'" For the first time, in that wild place, Stewart Udall came to appreciate why his opponents in the dam debates had felt so strongly that the river ought to be left alone. You had to see it to want to save it. He published an article soon afterward taking himself to task for his support of the dams. That year, he also travelled to upstate New York and paddled a canoe with Robert Kennedy in the Hudson River Derby, to promote the pending Wild and Scenic Rivers legislation. It passed the following year. The act now covers more than twelve thousand miles of rivers and streams, including two stretches of the Rio Grande—the Lower Canyons and Boquillas. Now his son wanted to hear what this canyon had to say to him.

And here we were. The walls closed in—steep, streaked limestone cliffs with a terra-cotta tinge, pocked high and low with dark openings big and small, made by waterfalls during an era, post-Ice Age, when these precincts were lush. The water, clearer here, took on the colors of the cliffs, and of the salt cedars that crowded the shore. The air had a prehistoric hush, except for



the dip of paddles in the current and the tuneful descending song of the canyon wren.

The first night's camp, called Puerto Rico, was Mile 8, river right, a broad floodplain of sand, stones, and grass. Puerto Rico was in Mexico. (After September 11th, Americans were not supposed to pull ashore, much less spend the night, on the Mexican side, but in recent years the authorities have relaxed a bit.) We set up a bucket brigade to offload the accoutrements of our portable hotel: folding tables and chairs, four-burner range, Dutch oven, propane tanks, coolers, water jugs, dozens of duffel-size dry bags, tents, and camping mattresses known as paco pads. You can carry a lot more in a boat than in a backpack. The laws of flotation allow for comfort and encourage excess. As the guides worked, the guests scattered to claim sites to pitch their tents. Dry bags spilled out domestic consolations: clean clothes, toiletries, pillows, headlamps. You could

hear some light argument among spouses and siblings amid the clickety-clack of tent poles. LeRoy shooed away some grazing cattle and used a rake to remove cow dung from the prime tent spots. Udall took over for a while. Roosevelt said, "Someone has to get a picture of the Senator shovelling shit."

Roosevelt, a seventy-five-year-old investment banker, who served in Vietnam with the Navy SEALs, was dressed like Udall, but with a Stetson hat and a red bandanna around his neck. He had a radio-friendly baritone and a solicitous air. A life-long conservationist and Republican, by inheritance and practice, he is among those in his party who are dismayed by Trump yet are still striving, against diminishing odds, to find some workable common ground. He's the kind of environmentalist who can acknowledge and regret the occasionally invasive and inflexible nature of a federally enforced regimen. Nonetheless, the rollbacks and predations

of this Administration appall him.

In 1903, Roosevelt's great-grandfather, as President, established the National Wildlife Refuge system, with the designation of Pelican Island, in Florida—the first instance of the federal government putting aside land for wildlife. As it happens, one of the first sections of the border wall was scheduled to be built on a national wildlife refuge in the lower Rio Grande, the Santa Ana, one of the region's most crucial habitats for migratory birds. Last year, contractors for the Department of Homeland Security arrived there to drill test holes. Just upriver last summer, at the National Butterfly Center, a privately owned refuge, a staff member discovered a crew of workers, sent by U.S. Customs and Border Protection, on the center's property, clearing brush and chopping down trees, in preparation for the wall, which would strand two-thirds of the center's land on the "Mexican" side of the wall. The butterfly center has sued the federal government. "We understand that not everyone in the country may be as interested in butterflies or in the environment as we are," the head of the center told *The Texas Observer*. "But everyone should care when the government thinks it can do whatever it wants on your private property."

This is one of the reasons that the Trump Administration has been eying federal lands. Thanks to a 2005 Patriot Act provision—the REAL I.D. waiver—federal agencies were able, under the guise of national security, to ignore environmental and historic-preservation laws in building hundreds of miles of border fencing during the Bush Administration. Earlier this year, a lawsuit challenging the waiver, filed by environmental groups and the State of California, came before a federal judge in San Diego, Gonzalo Curiel. Curiel, you'll recall, was the judge in the Trump University case whom Trump, during his campaign, had called "a hater of Donald Trump" who "happens to be, we believe, Mexican." This time, Curiel sided with Trump.

Yet, last month, Congress, in its \$1.3-trillion omnibus spending bill, essentially blocked the building of a wall through the Santa Ana refuge—for

now, anyway. The bill provided hundreds of millions of dollars to enhance existing fencing and to reinforce levees on both sides but mandated a three-mile gap. (For patrollers, this is the busiest section of Texas's southern border; they apprehended more than a hundred and thirty-seven thousand people crossing there last year, twenty-three times more than they did in the bigger but far less populous sector of the Big Bend.) Other wildlife refuges along the river were not spared. The South Texas stretch of the Rio Grande was the most affected. Still, Congress provided nowhere near the funds Trump had requested, and so in recent weeks he has started talking about deploying the military to the border, or raiding the military's budget to fund a wall. On April 3rd, he announced that he was calling in the National Guard, though, strictly speaking, he doesn't, as President, have the power to do so.

The kayak on the trip, which a few of us took turns paddling, was one of the vessels that had conveyed McDonald from source to sea, a few years before. It still bore traces of the messages that his wife had written all over it, in indelible ink, to keep him company. Lean, bearded, fervid, and quick-spoken, McDonald had brought along some books about the river for people to look through before dinner. He also had a photocopy of Reicher's 1977 journal, in a freezer bag. He seemed to know more about the current state of the Rio Grande than anyone. "The Colorado, always the Colorado—it's like the pretty girl," he said. "The Rio Grande isn't seen, treated, or valued as a river. My wife's from Brownsville, and I introduced *her* to the Rio Grande. People think, The river is dirty, it's poverty, it's disease." He was involved in efforts to address various ills, but, in light of the obstacles (and in spite of his enthusiasm), he did not evince much hope. "We have nineteenth-century laws, twentieth-century infrastructure, and twenty-first-century problems," he liked to say. His focus, in the short term, was finding ways to get kids on the water, to introduce them to its glories, such as they are, and to begin

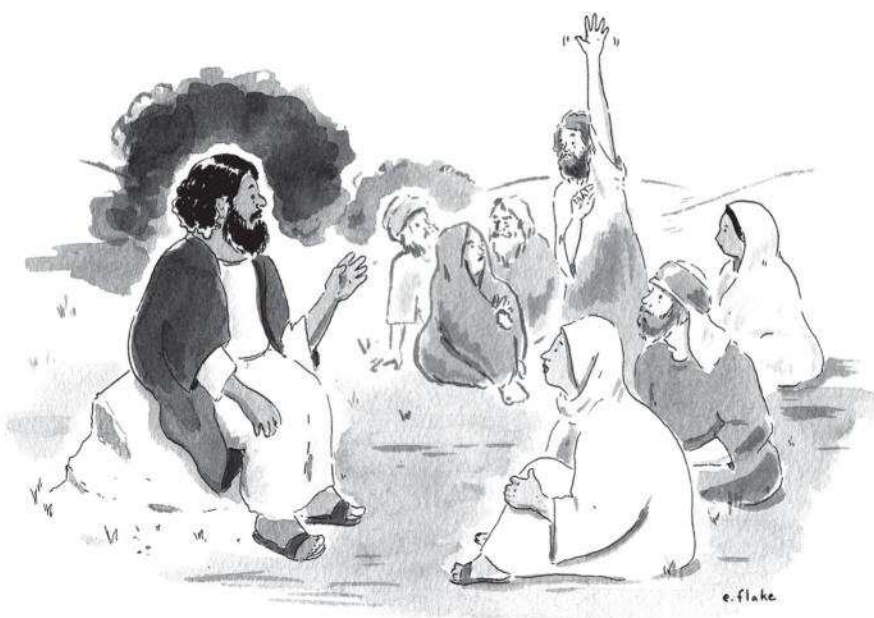
to restore awareness of it, from the ground up.

He pointed to the shrubs that clung to the base of the steep cliff: *candelilla*, a source of wax used in the production of lip balm, candles, religious figurines, and chewing gum. A hundred years ago, there was a Great Wax Rush here, with factories on both sides of the river, but now it's a small-time affair. He described how people on the Mexican side rip the shrubs out of the soil, boil them with sulfuric acid in vats at a camp downstream, skim the wax off the surface, and then transport it by donkey out of the canyon, up to the mesa, and into Boquillas. On a good day, a *candelillero* can produce about ten dollars' worth of it. "It's either that or running a ferry," McDonald said.

That night, after dinner (tilapia), flashes strobed above the canyon's southern walls. "Heat lightning," someone said, as someone usually does, and there arose a debate about whether there really is such a thing. The wind changed direction and began honking downriver. The camp seemed to be blowing apart. Then came hot pods of rain. I was determined to sleep under the stars, but after an hour of being blasted by sand, amid a light show of indeterminate origin and consequence, I gave in, and Ben Masters and I set

up a tent in the dark. As we lay down, he barked, "Scorpion!" We began thrashing around, our headlamps berserking until my beam found a pale spider the size of a silver dollar, which he'd brushed from his leg. Masters got it with his water bottle, and, with the tent flaps slapping around in the wind, we settled down to a night of fitful sleep.

A river trip is a comedy of manners that commences each day with the sheepish, intermittent parade to the groover. The groover is the name of the makeshift portable latrine, which is typically set up at some remove from camp, out of sight and yet often with a stunning outlook, to make up for the flies and the lack of a stall door. It is called the groover because the body of the toilet is an old ammunition can stood on its side—on a wilderness river, you must pack everything out, including human waste, and an ammo can, being sealable and unbreakable, is ready-made—and, when one sits on it, one winds up with a groove on each cheek of one's rear end. Usually, nowadays, a toilet seat is placed atop the opening, to moderate the experience. Still, the old moniker pertains, as does the ritual of campers competing, without demonstrating that they are doing so, to be the first, or at least among



"I see you, Jake—but does anyone have a question that's not about carpentry?"

the first, to visit the groover, each day after dawn.

Typically, there is a sign indicating that the groover is occupied—a paddle, or a bandanna on a bush. On the Rio Grande, this was a smaller ammo can, like a lunchbox, which contained paper, hand cleanser, and (for the lucky camper on groover detail) latex gloves. The smaller box's visible presence, in a designated spot en route to the groover, indicated that the facility was free. The sight of someone carrying a lunchbox to the shit box, and the experience of cheerfully passing a fellow-boater on the way to and fro (perhaps with a tip of the hat and a "G'morning, Ma'am"), become so commonplace that, by Day Three, any stigma surrounding the procedure is gone. The groover unites us all.

This was not a topic for discussion, however, during the morning coffee conversations initiated by Reicher. The barracks banter typical of other river trips was replaced by a mediated discussion about the Rio Grande and its discontents, chief among them the wall. In the shade of the canyon, as the sunlight gradually made its way down the cliffs on the American side—*there's your wall!*—Reicher asked Austin Alvarado to say a few words to the group, which was seated in a circle of folding chairs.

"The idea of a wall is so un-American to me," Alvarado said. "Is this America first, or America only?" Alvarado, twenty-five, described how his mother, and later his father and brother—all of them Guatemalans—had crossed the river near Brownsville. Udall asked, "Austin, are you a Dreamer?"

"No, I was born here."

Someone joked, "You say 'here,' but we're in Mexico now."

"I was born in Austin, Texas, which is how I got my name," Alvarado said. "I have cousins who are Dreamers, though."

"You're called an anchor baby on the other side," Udall said wryly.

Alvarado and Masters had spent a couple of days with Representative Will Hurd, a Republican from Texas, who strongly opposes the wall—which he has called "a third-century solution to a twenty-first-century prob-

lem." He prefers a so-called smart wall, the deployment of camera and drone technology to trace movement on the border, especially in remote areas. You can see instances of this approach here and there in the Big Bend region; a giant unmanned blimp hovers high over the desert south of Marfa. (In the omnibus spending bill, Congress approved about two hundred million dollars that could be used for this kind of security.)

The group began to talk about a kind of antidote to the wall, an idea that Reicher had only just heard of the month before but which has been around since Franklin D. Roosevelt's Administration discussed it, in the thirties: a binational park, linking the existing Big Bend park and some adjacent public lands, on the American side, with millions of acres of wild country, both public and private, already set aside just across the river. The Mexican government has designated more than four million acres as protected. Cemex, the Mexican building-materials behemoth, had bought up ranches along both sides of the river, in the interest of land preservation and the reintroduction of bighorn sheep. (When Trump was elected, Cemex was assumed to be a likely provider of cement for the wall, but the company has stated that it wouldn't be bidding on the job.) As it is, the Chihuahuan ecosystem straddles the border and exceeds the limits of any existing park. Why shouldn't the parks and preserves be integrated somehow? One precedent is Waterton-Glacier International Peace Park, along the mountainous border between Montana and Alberta. But no one had ever thought of putting up a wall to keep out the Canadians.

The next day, we paddled eleven miles in the canyon. Several guests flipped their canoes. It doesn't take much, once you get caught broadside against a rock in swift water. Roosevelt, in a boat with Masters, hit a submerged boulder, and into the drink they went, along with Masters's fancy camera. Everyone had a laugh.

Camp was on the Mexican side again, just upriver of a two-pronged tower of limestone known as Rabbit

Ears. Again the rituals: the load-in, the scramble for good ground, dry shorts, groover. Bob Irvin broke out a fly rod, in the hope of catching a long-nose gar, a prehistoric fish native to these waters. McDonald brought out his books. There was swimming and beer-drinking in the sun, some exploration of a slot canyon, and then later, after dinner (Dutch-oven lasagna), in the dark, more Chautauqua—more schemes and dreams. Another storm blew in, and at night's end a group of us lingered under the kitchen tarp, telling river tales. Killer holes, unfamiliar beasts, mysterious strangers. Reicher recalled finding, in a hot springs in the Lower Canyons, a new genus of isopod crustacean, one that glowed in the dark, which is unusual for a freshwater bug. He took some pickled samples back to Dartmouth and got a grant to do more research, but by the time he returned to the hot springs a flood had washed out the pools and the bugs were gone.

Masters and Alvarado told a story, from their Rio Grande adventure, about a mischievous friend of Masters's who secretly served the two of them and a cat-loving friend an elaborate taco breakfast made with bobcat meat. I was thinking of laying out my paco pad under the tarp, but as the rain intensified a phalanx of those big pale spiders came up over the sand, eyes goggling in the beams of our headlamps. They kept converging on Masters, as though to avenge the one from the night before. We pitched a tent.

In the Grand Canyon, my friends had, after a week, got into a mode of talking to one another almost exclusively in the diction and cadence of a nineteenth-century explorer's journals: "Cabbage stores are mostly depleted and what is left is sodden and rancid. The men grow restless." I found myself the next morning, over pancakes and coffee, privately lapsing into it. *Morale high, weather improving, Masters unbowed.*

"Hey, I have an idea," someone said.

"I have one, too," Masters said.

"Sweet!"

"Double sweet."

It was a bluebird morning. A tailwind, a blessing in these parts, sped us out of the canyon and into an open

desert basin—out of what was, on the American side, Big Bend National Park and into the Black Gap Wildlife Management Area. (It was amazing to consider that the Big Bend park is the southern terminus, geologically speaking, of both the Appalachians and the Rockies—that the ranges, or at least the rock that distinguishes them, almost touch here.) For hours, the river tunnelled lazily through the cane and wound around until Mexico, confusingly, was to our north. We camped on that side again, along a run where Irvin spent another hour in mid-stream, backlit amid the riffles, as if in some fishing magazine, tossing a fly line toward the American side, to no avail—no gar. Udall passed around some Cohibas, then sat half-submerged and shirtless in an eddy, smoking one of them: a ride on the wild side. Someone put out Fritos and guacamole. A group hiked to the top of a nearby mesa just before sunset and took in hundreds of square miles of mountainous desert—a good chunk of a would-be peace park. You could also see a lot of this from the groover—of which the returning mesa hikers had an unobstructed view.

This was the first clear night, eagerly anticipated, since the area is a so-called dark-sky preserve, advantageous for gazing at the stars. The sky was soon full. After dinner (steak), a dozen or so of the group gathered by a fire and passed around a bottle of whiskey while playing what they called a drinking game, initiated by Masters: “If you were President, which fifty-mile stretch of unprotected river, anywhere in the United States, would you designate as Wild and Scenic?” One by one, people spoke of their favorite threatened waterways—the Pecos, the Pigeon, the Crow—until, under the spell of the whiskey and the stars and the rustle of the Rio Grande, it seemed possible that each pronouncement had the force of law. I slept outside and woke up with a headache. *Dover’s powder depleted. The men complain of ague.*

There’s something forlorn about the last run of a river trip, when you know it ends in a shuttle van rather than at a camp. A cold front washed in, bringing drizzle and a chilly headwind,



“You don’t need me. You don’t need anyone. You are Americans.”

and, as the flotilla passed through some slack water and a rapid that a guide called Eat Shit Rock, you could begin to see, along the banks, evidence of harder use. Abandoned infrastructure: an old mining tram, a pier improvised out of a rusting truck chassis. The big lode around here had been fluorspar. Dow Chemical once had an operation in La Linda, on the Mexican side, connected to the American side by a steel-and-concrete bridge, high above the river. This had been a busy crossing. But the mines shut down in the early nineties, and then, soon afterward, the bridge did, too, after a drug smuggler killed a Mexican customs agent. Now La Linda was a ghost town, with a ghost bridge, in the middle of the longest stretch

of the river with no active border crossing.

This is where the trip came to an end, on a sandbar across from the ruins of La Linda. The vans were waiting, with trailers for the boats. Just before we got there, we passed beneath the defunct bridge, its underbelly warted up with swallows’ nests. On the roadbed above, the array of median barriers and fences, including a reinforced-mesh overhang in the shape of a backstop, brought to mind the collection of wall prototypes that Trump had recently gone to see in San Diego—the disembodied slabs that some had likened to conceptual art. Would they work? Had these? We loaded the canoes onto the trailers. From up on the bank, the river didn’t look like much. ♦

BEAN FREAKS

On the hunt for an elusive legume.

BY BURKHARD BILGER

The best meal of my life, or at least the most memorable, came from a can. I was thirteen at the time and living in France, so that may have had something to do with it. But I credit the beans. My older sisters and I were at a hippie camp in the Alps that summer, not far from the Italian border. My parents had stashed us there while they went home to Oklahoma to check on our house, which they'd rented to some graduate students while my father was on sabbatical. The camp was the cheapest one they could find, and they seemed to have done next to no research before signing us up. My mother just loved the name: Jeunesse du Soleil Levant, Youth of the Rising Sun.

As it turned out, we rarely woke before noon. The camp had promised a vigorous program of crafts, hikes, and team-building games, but the counsellors were usually too hungover, or too caught up in their tent-hopping romances, to bother. (On the last day of camp, I found a stack of unopened boxes behind the mess tent; they were filled with modelling clay and watercolor paints.) We spent most afternoons playing cards and plunking guitars, killing time till after dinner, when we'd hike down to the village to drink beer with grenadine and dance to French disco music.

It was paradise, mostly. The exception was the few mornings when our counsellors, seized by a spasm of conscience, would roust us from our tents and lead us on forced marches through the mountains, declaring that this was what summer camp was all about. It was on one of those trips, on the shore of a frigid lake, that I had the meal of my life. I was famished by then and wobbly with fatigue. I'd spent too many days lounging around, and a counsellor had stuffed two giant cans of cassoulet in my backpack before we left. French trail mix. When we pried them open

for dinner, there were only white beans inside, flecked with salt pork. They had one flavor, one texture, one purpose—to fill my stomach—but that was enough. Hunger is a simple thing, an alarm bell in the brain. Sometimes there's nothing better than shutting it off.

I thought about that meal last spring, when I first met Steve Sando. We were standing at a table heaped with hibiscus flowers, at an outdoor market in the town of Ixmiquilpan, three hours north of Mexico City in the state of Hidalgo. It was a Thursday morning in May, and the stalls were full of women gossiping and picking through produce: corn fungus and cactus paddles, purslane and pickling lime, agave buds and papalo leaf that smelled of mint and gasoline. Sando, who is fifty-eight, ambled among them in a white guayabera shirt, untucked at the waist. He had on loose jeans, tennis shoes, and a bright-red baseball cap that said "Rancho Gordo" above the bill. He could hardly have looked more American, yet he fit in perfectly somehow. He was built like a giant bean.

That may seem too easy, beans being Sando's business. But people are often shaped by their obsessions, and in Sando's case the similarities are hard to miss. His body is mostly torso, his skin both ruddy and tanned, like a pinto. He makes a colorful first impression, gets a little starchy if you crowd him, then slowly softens up. Fifteen years ago, when Sando founded Rancho Gordo, he had no food-retailing or farming experience. Now he's the country's largest retailer of heirloom beans and a minor celebrity in the culinary world. He's a side dish who's become a staple.

"This to me . . . it just makes me so happy," he said. He was holding a bag of rayado chilies, smoked over an oak fire. He stuck his nose deep inside and inhaled. Weeks later, in my pantry at

home, a jar of these chilies would abruptly blossom with black moths, hatched from eggs embedded in their flesh. But Sando was just thinking how great they'd be with a mess of beans. We passed tables of epazote, an herb said to prevent flatulence, and bowls of a greenish-gray soil with a vaguely vegetal smell. "Pond scum from Lake Texcoco," Sando said. "We use it to soften beans." To Sando, everything in Mexico seems to connect to beans, and through them to the rest of world cuisine. When he's at home, in Napa, California, he sometimes gives talks at local elementary schools. He starts by asking the kids where pizza comes from.

"Italy!"

"Wrong. Mexico! That's where tomatoes are from. What about chocolate?"

"Switzerland!"

"Nope. Mexico! That's where cocoa beans are from. How about vanilla?"

"Mexico?"

"That's right! And chilies, corn, and squash, too." Many of the staples of European and Asian cooking came from Mesoamerica via the Spanish, he explains. It's called the Columbian Exchange, but it wasn't much of a trade for the Mesoamericans. They got turnips, barley, and spinach.

Sando is a rather sheepish addition to that history. He's uneasy about import regulations, fretful of cultural appropriation, and well aware of his fumbling grasp of Mexican custom. "I'm not the Indiana Jones of beans," he told me. "I'm the Don Quixote." Every year, he takes one or two trips to Mexico to look for rare varieties and farmers who might grow them for him. He was in Ixmiquilpan to search for an especially elusive quarry: Flor de Durazno, the Flower of the Peach. This was a dainty, pinkish-brown bean of uncommon taste and velvety texture, grown in Hidalgo. Sando had seen it once in his life, in a package sent



Rancho Gordo's heirloom beans look like gems in a jewelry case. The company sells half a million pounds of them a year.

to his office by a farmer not far from this market. He was hoping to buy two thousand pounds for his Bean Club.

I happen to be a member of the Bean Club, though I'm a little reluctant to admit it. Not that it isn't a pretty exclusive thing. Anyone can buy beans from Rancho Gordo, but the Bean Club—which sends members six rare varieties and a few other oddments, like blue hominy, every three months—closed its rolls last year. Sando couldn't keep up with demand. Still, admitting that you're obsessed with beans is a little like saying you collect decorative plates. It marks your taste as untrustworthy. I've seen the reaction often enough in my family: the eye roll and stifled cough, the muttered aside as I show yet another guest the wonders of my well-lit and cleverly organized bean closet. As my daughter Evangeline put it one night, a bit melodramatically, when I served beans for the third time in a week, "Lord, why couldn't it have been bacon or chocolate?"

Beans are the middle child of American cooking, the food we forget we love. Back in Oklahoma, after my fa-

ther's sabbatical, they always seemed to be covered in cheese, coated in ketchup and molasses, or tossed into a three-bean salad like so many protein pellets. The closest I came to the cassoulet was the Sea Island Red Peas that I had in Charleston one spring, thirty years later. They were an heirloom variety, reintroduced by the food historian Glenn Roberts at Anson Mills—potent little field peas, possessed of an unreasonably rich brown broth. But Anson Mills had only the one variety to offer, along with some Purple Cape beans from time to time. Then I found Rancho Gordo.

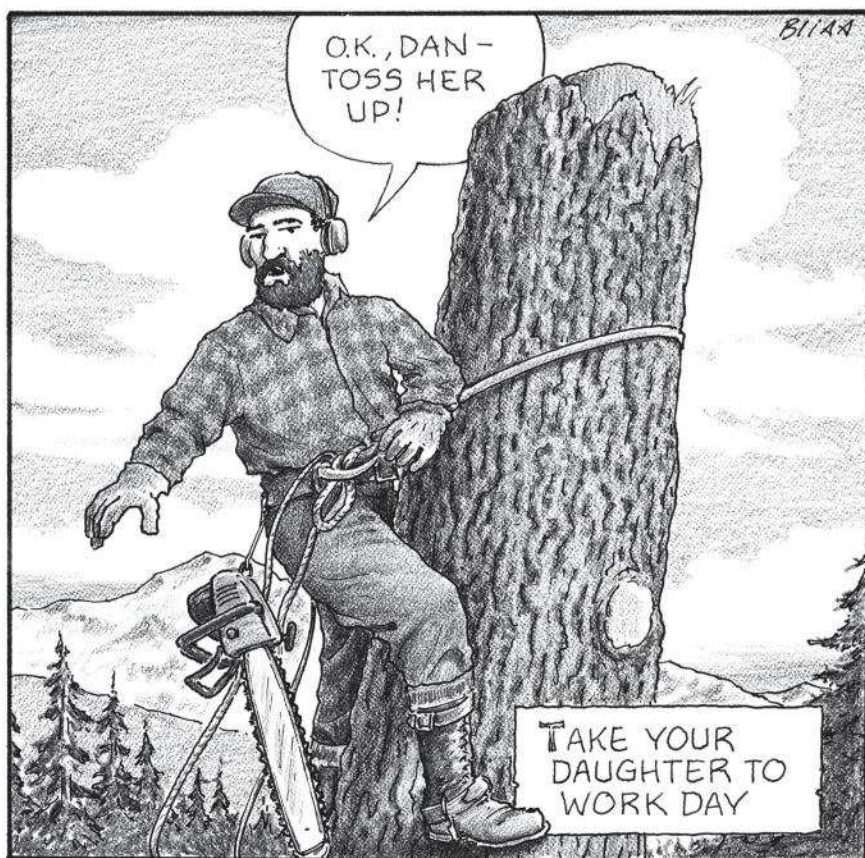
The beans on Sando's site look like gems in a jewelry case: crimson, violet, black, and gold; stippled, striped, and swirled. They bear evocative names—Eye of the Goat, Yellow Indian Woman—and range in size from tiny Pinquitos to Royal Coronas the size of a baby's ear. There is, admittedly, some risk of false advertising. Once the beans have cooked, the colors run and fade, leaving a soupy pot of brownish seeds. The inky depth of a black bean, or the grassiness of a flageolet, is easy to taste. But most varieties aren't nearly as distinct as their bright costumes portend.

Cooking beans is like going to see clowns and sword swallowers at a circus, only to find them all sitting inside the tent, playing canasta. "It's God's little joke," Sando told me.

Sando knows how it is to have a divided nature. How a flashy exterior can conceal a modest but hearty interior. As a boy, growing up in Sausalito in the early seventies, he had his share of social handicaps. He was gay in an era of reflexive homophobia, overweight long before the body-positive movement, and, as a child of divorced parents, always shuttling between homes and schools. He felt both anonymous and glaringly conspicuous. "I was so tired of being the fat new kid," he told me. "I remember in sixth grade, just after my parents divorced, I sat down next to this girl in summer school, and I heard her say, 'Well, I guess we have a fat fag on our hands.' It was like I could hear the violins going backward." His father, a former Disney animator who'd worked on "101 Dalmatians," wished him sleeker and more successful; his mother, a nurse, wished him a little more conventional. When he first told them that he was gay, at eighteen, "they let it be known that this was not O.K.," Sando recalls. "But they came around. My father marched in the gay-pride parade a few years later."

In his late teens, Sando lost weight and found his crowd, learned to improvise on the piano, and discovered, to his great surprise, that he'd become rather good-looking. "What we call a twink now," he says. Although he never found a true, long-term partner, he married a friend of a friend in his late thirties and had two boys with her, now nineteen and sixteen. "I'd had every lesbian on the planet ask me for sperm," he says. "But there was a side of me that said, 'I can't do this as a passive bystander.'" They raised the boys in adjacent houses for a few years, then divorced. "There's a sitcom waiting to happen," he says. But he tells the story flatly, without grievance or irony, as if giving a deposition. "The truth is that your sexual identity is just about the least interesting thing about you," he says. "Do you play an instrument? That would be interesting."

Sando now lives with his younger son in the hills above Napa Valley, in a former Seventh-Day Adventist church



that he's decorated with Mexican colonial art and religious icons. (The icons seem to be working. A few weeks after I visited, when wildfires ripped through Northern California, Sando sent me a video of his property: the house was untouched, the trees around it burned to charcoal and ash.) When he's at ease, he can be loose and self-deprecating, with a mildly sardonic wit. But he's never quite lost his childhood wariness. His default mode is a kind of prickly joviality, a gregarious misanthropy. He likes people just enough to spend a lot of time with them, at which point he realizes that, on second thought, he'd rather be alone.

In the years between high school and having children, Sando drifted between gainful and fanciful employment. He took a few courses at San Francisco State and at the College of Marin, spent six months backpacking through India, moved to Santa Fe, then London, then to San Francisco again, where he landed a job with Esprit in 1982. The company was in its heyday, selling bright-colored clothes for the notionally idealistic. Sando started out answering phones and was soon overseeing multimillion-dollar accounts. He was a natural salesman, he found, with a gift for turning that striped blouse with pearl buttons into a story that buyers wanted to hear. Esprit's hip corporate culture—its non-hierarchical offices and upward mobility, free Italian lessons and half-price opera tickets—left a mark on him, he says. But what really stuck was the shrewd branding. The way a luxurious dress could cast a halo over the rest of the line, so that customers felt good getting what they really wanted: the rainbow T-shirt. "They wanted it because the fashion line made them want it," he says.

Sando left for Milan after five years, thinking that he'd eventually take a job in Esprit's Italian office. Instead, he wrote to a local radio station offering to host an hour-long jazz show, and, to his shock, the station agreed. The show, which he called "Mr. Lucky," mixed ambient cocktail sounds with classics from Frank Sinatra and Sarah Vaughan ("My listeners pronounced it *Vo-gon*"). It developed a following but paid next to nothing, and a year later Sando was back in San Francisco, broke. There followed a string of near-misses and half-successes:

music reviewing, music licensing, a zine, a Web site, a Web-site-designing business—the dot-com hopscotch of the late nineties. "Always hand to mouth, always just about to make it," as he puts it. His mother's family was well off, and in the back of his mind Sando had long assumed that, if nothing else worked, an inheritance might bail him out. But his grandmother willed everything to his stepgrandfather, who willed everything to his nurse. "I was turning forty by then, and I thought, O.K., you're a major fuckup," Sando says. "Just start a garden and get a job at Target."

The gardening, at least, was a success. In 2000, Sando moved to a house outside Napa, on two and a half acres of land. He planted heirloom Mexican tomatoes at first, then some rare bean varieties he'd found in seed catalogues, and was soon overwhelmed with produce. "I thought I had a gift," he told me. "But really it was Napa. Anything can grow in Napa." When the farmers' market in town wouldn't have him, he settled for the scruffier one in Yountville, nine miles to the north. But sales were slow. The beans were pretty enough, but a little intimidating: pebbles somehow to be made edible. Shoppers were always mistaking them for candied nuts. "They weren't part of the standard repertoire," Sando says. "People would ask, 'What's your best bean?' And the subtext was: 'Beans are bad. Which is the least bad?'" Most of the time, he'd suggest Good Mother Stal-lards—gorgeous, purple-and-red speckled beans that make a rich broth. But they'd usually shake their heads: "Oh, no, I don't like dark beans."

Then one day, in 2003, Thomas Keller came by. His restaurant, the French Laundry, which would later earn three Michelin stars, happened to be in Yountville. "I remember, he had probably a dozen different beans on the table," Keller told me recently. "To get something that freshly dried was a revelation." The bean that caught Keller's eye was a greenish-yellow thing with a red-rimmed eye, like a soybean with a hangover. Called the Vallarta, it was on the verge of extinction when Sando found it, but it had a dense, fudgy texture and gave a good broth. "Steve had taken something that used to be

just a dried bean and raised it to a new level, where the flavor was really intense and it cooked so much more consistently," Keller said. Within a month, it was a staple of the French Laundry. Within a year, every chef in California seemed to be serving beans.

Sando had got it all wrong. He'd been selling beans as a health food, a sop for the meatless. He'd even named his company with the intent of pitching a bean-based diet: Rancho Gordo, Fat Ranch. But all that earnest salesmanship had just made beans seem unappetizing. "People don't buy moral food," Sando told me. "They think they do, but they don't. It's all about the flavor." It was another version of the halo effect he'd seen at Esprit: "You start with the chefs and you work your way down."

The real problem was supply, not demand. Sando had reached the limits of his bean-farming abilities. "I'm very good at the early stages," he says. "I'm, like, Oh, yeah, I've controlled nature. She's my bitch. But by August I'm thinking, Please, let this be over." Not long after Keller's visit, Sando began looking for a farmer. He tried hiring some wonky young guys with "groovy ag ideas," but their results were as unreliable as his. He approached a few industrial growers, but they said his beans weren't worth the bother. Heirlooms were too finicky, the yields too low, the orders too small—ten thousand pounds from farmers accustomed to growing two million. Sando's prices could more than make up for all that: his beans retail for six dollars a pound, about three times the cost of ordinary varieties. But to cover the perceived risk he still had to guarantee some contracts. The farmer got paid even if a crop failed. Finally, in 2012, Sando handed the crop management over to James Schrupp, an agronomist and former commodities trader who's married to the food writer Georgeanne Brennan. Most of Schrupp's growers are in California's San Joaquin and Sacramento Valleys and in Washington's Columbia Basin, though Royal Coronas are grown in Poland. "Jim speaks farmer, which turns out to be a universal language," Sando told me.

Rancho Gordo now sells half a million pounds of beans a year. The chefs have been followed by other celebrities—bold figures like Andy Richter

and Emilio Estevez, unafraid of legumes—and then by ordinary customers. Sando's beans have sent their tendrils into the “*Saveur* 100” and *O, The Oprah Magazine*, and he has published four cookbooks. A few years ago, he was looking through a list of orders on his computer when he found one from Marcella Hazan, the doyenne of Italian cuisine in the United States. He sent her an inscribed copy of his first cookbook, “Heirloom Beans,” published in 2008, and they struck up a correspondence. Soon he had tracked down Hazan's favorite bean: the Sorana, a type of cannellini that grows along the Pescia River, in Tuscany. This is a bean so tender, with a skin so vanishingly thin, that Rossini once accepted several pounds in exchange for correcting another composer's score. Sando found a farmer to grow it in California and renamed it the Marcella. When the *Times* ran a piece about it two years ago, after it went on sale at Rancho Gordo, the orders crashed the Web site.

“This is how all our bean adventures go,” Sando said. “*Mercado, iglesia, comida, siesta.*” Market, church, food, sleep. We were sitting in the cool confines of San Miguel Arcángel, the coral-colored church that looms over Ixmiquilpan. We'd eaten a great deal of mutton barbacoa at the market, then spent an hour exploring the deserted sixteenth-century convent next door. I was ready for the siesta. Sando, though, wanted to see the sanctuary first. He loved these old colonial buildings, with their bare stone cells and dusky chapels, their peeling saints and tin retables, crimped with wonder and pain. But, like so much in Mexico, they left him discomfited, unsure of his role. Was he a tourist? An amateur art collector? A fair-trade emissary who'd volunteered for Cesar Chavez while still in high school? Or was he just “the gringo elephant in the room”?

Ixmiquilpan was one of his favorite towns in Mexico, but it didn't always ingratiate itself with outsiders. Its name means “place where the pigweed cuts like knives.” In 1548, when Augustinian friars arrived to convert the local Otomi, they used forced labor to build this church. The results may not have been what they expected. All around us in the

sanctuary, crumbling frescoes reached up into the nave: centaurs and griffins, eagle knights and coyote warriors. The Otomi hadn't just repurposed Christian imagery; they'd replaced it with their own. Instead of angels and saints, there were soldiers beheading one another; instead of Madonnas and Christs, there were pregnant women sprouting from acanthus buds. Sando shook his head: “Every time I come to Mexico, I feel like I know less than I did before.”

Next to him on the pew, Yunuén Carrillo Quiroz gazed up at the altar with a look of mingled pride and disquiet. She and her husband, Gabriel Cortés García, manage all of Rancho Gordo's operations in Mexico. They are Sando's fixers, farm managers, production coördinators, and fellow bean researchers. Quiroz, forty-two, is from Mexico City, the daughter of a logistics supervisor at Ford; García, thirty-nine, is from a village near Ixmiquilpan, the eldest son of a social worker. Quiroz is the urban sophisticate, bright and articulate, with a round laughing face and connections with the best restaurants in Mexico City. García is the savvy local, quiet and watchful, with a broad-shouldered frame and a good head for numbers. “It took the right gringo and the right Mexicans to make this happen,” Sando said.

And yet the three of them straddled two cultures as uneasily as the Otomi. The frescoes were ostensibly about the tribe's battles against the Chichimecas to the north, but Quiroz saw a different message. “They're a call to war for all indigenous people,” she said. “Even the eagle above the altar is wearing a native headdress. When Christ's blood is served at Communion, it's a kind of blood sacrifice.” Quiroz told me the story of La Malinche, the infamous native woman who served as Cortés's translator and adviser during the conquest. As Rancho Gordo has expanded its Mexican operations, some chefs in Mexico City have accused Quiroz of being a culinary La Malinche. “They say, ‘Why are you telling him about these beans?’” Sando said. “‘Why didn't you tell us first?’ Well, the beans were there all along.”

“It's true that a lot of the really good Mexican products get exported,” the chef Enrique Olvera told me. “But if

you keep some here and export the rest there's no problem. Food migrates.” Olvera is the owner of Pujol, in Mexico City, which is often cited as one of the best restaurants in the world, and of Cosme and Atla, in New York. He met Quiroz ten years ago and has been a Rancho Gordo customer ever since. The Columbian Exchange is less lopsided than it used to be, he pointed out. Mexican cooks use cilantro and cheese, from Asia and Europe. Why not share their beans?

Mexico is the cradle of the common bean. It's where *Phaseolus vulgaris* first evolved, two million years ago, and it still has the greatest bean diversity in the world. “I always had a fantasy of bringing beans from here,” Sando told me. But when he first came to Mexico, in 2001, he had no import-export experience, no real connections. Although he spoke a little Spanish, he'd never mastered the accent and had a disconcerting habit of mixing in Italian words. (“It's like music, really,” he says.) Worse still, he had no idea where to find the best varieties. He kept getting wrong-footed. At one point, at a market in Mexico City, he came upon a basket of beans as bright and various as a designer's color wheel. *Revuelto*, the seller called them. It was only later, after Sando had bought several pounds, that he realized that these weren't some magical, rainbow-colored variety; they were random beans tossed together. *Revuelto* means “scrambled.”

When Sando did manage to locate a bean that he wanted to grow in the United States, the locals wouldn't sell it to him. “They were appalled,” he told me. “They were, like, ‘Seeds are life.’” Why would they give their greatest asset away? Sando asked if they could grow the beans locally, then export them to the United States. But that still made no sense to them. For decades, agronomists had been telling Mexican farmers to get with the program, to grow the latest high-yielding varieties in order to compete with China and Peru. Now here was this strange, excitable American saying he didn't like modern beans. He'd much rather have the ones their grandparents grew. “They were incredulous,” Sando says. He was paying them to regress.

Sando met Quiroz and García in

2008. A year earlier, the couple had started exporting dried prickly-pear-cactus fruit and other local specialties from Hidalgo. They were young, childless (they now have a six-year-old daughter, Yunuécita), and as hungry to explore their country as Sando was. A pattern was established: Sando would fly down and they'd pile into a truck with a few bags. Then they'd set off for Michoacán, Oaxaca, Veracruz, the Yucatán—anywhere with a great bean-cooking tradition. Which seemed to be everywhere. They'd start in the village markets, then zero in on the older ladies at the periphery, in the indigenous section, with small sacks of produce from their gardens. If they found an interesting bean, García would talk to the farmers, Quiroz would talk to the women, and Sando would stay out of the way till the deal was done. "We try not to irritate people," Quiroz says.

Everywhere they went, they found new beans. Some were spectacular, like the delicate, rose-colored Lila that grew in Morelos, in the shadow of an active volcano. Others never caught on, like the Ron bean from the Yucatán, with its thick ochre skin and bland flesh, or the Veronico, from the town of Tecozautla, which looked like a pine nut but tasted like a cowpea. There were always new varieties to take their place, though. "It was like Ali Baba," Quiroz told me. "We discovered an explosion of beans."

Late one morning at the hacienda where García grew up, in the thorn-and-blossom-covered hills southwest of Ixmiquilpan, Sando made me a pot of beans. The hacienda has an enormous wood-fired stove in the center of the kitchen, with seven burners of volcanic stone. When the building was a Jesuit monastery, in the eighteenth century, the stove was used to feed the brethren and their servants. After the Spanish crown evicted the Jesuits from Mexico, in 1767, the hacienda was bought by wealthy silver miners. While the kitchen served them and their guests, ranks of campesinos grew crops, tended cattle, and fermented pulque on the surrounding land. When the revolution came, the hacienda was looted, its chapel burned and its water lines shattered. What was left was half



"My favorite bean is always the last one I ate," Steve Sando says.

mansion and half ruin, still shunned by the local villagers. A precinct of ghosts.

The stove is rarely used now. García's mother and her best friend, Lupe, whose family bought the hacienda in the nineteen-thirties, prefer the gas range. Both women are exceptional cooks in the elaborate Mexican home style. In the days when I was there, they laid out dozens of dishes in the hacienda's formal dining room: black-bean rolls with sardines; chilaquiles with tomatillos and Oaxacan cheese; slender local avocados with edible, anise-flavored skin; and sweet, buttery slices of mamey, the fruit of a tropical evergreen tree. Lupe's cow's-foot soup was made with pieces of stomach, Puya chilies, and dried prickly-pear-cactus fruit. It had a deeply funky flavor and a mucilaginous texture that was off-putting at first—it was like sipping a whole cow—then weirdly addictive. But the beans were different. The beans were dead simple.

Sando and Lupe began by building a fire on the covered porch that encircled the hacienda's courtyard. She balanced a slender clay pot above the coals, then Sando poured in some olive oil and dropped in a handful of chopped onion. When they'd cooked awhile, he put in a few cups of water and a bowl of Moro beans, speckled black and gray

like a starling's belly. He added two whole cloves of garlic, a few crystals of Mixtecan salt, which contains natural softeners, and a bay leaf. Then Lupe set a small bowl of water on the pot, to serve as a lid and to replenish the beans, and left it to simmer.

Easy enough, yet everything they'd done was debatable. Lupe would have used lard instead of olive oil and raw instead of sautéed onion. She preferred avocado leaves to bay, and epazote to the Cuban oregano that Sando used. And those were just matters of taste. The thornier debates were technical. Should beans be soaked? (Yes, most cookbooks say, but that's only because store-bought beans are often years old.) When should they be salted? (After they're cooked, most recipes insist; but tests have shown that soaking and cooking beans in salt water both plumps them up and helps them hold their shape.) How should they be cooked? (Simmering is the rule, but Sando recommends a brief hard boil first, "to let them know you're the boss.") Is pressure-cooking allowed? (The French Laundry swears by it; Sando says it kills the broth.) The simpler the food, the more every variable counts.

Watching Sando and Lupe cook, I realized what I'd been doing wrong. I'd

been trying so hard to make my family love beans that my dishes had got more and more complicated, like the ones in Oklahoma. I'd added bacon, brown sugar, kielbasa, and Southern ham, whole heads of garlic and bunches of sage; I'd made minestrone, *pasta e fagioli*, and Brazilian feijoada. Good recipes, but poor psychology. Instead of showcasing the beans, I'd camouflaged them, turned them into a suspect food—an element to be rooted out, like the spinach that parents hide in pizza. “I hate recipes,” Sando said. “I always tell people to cook beans simply, and they always say, ‘Oh, I did. I just used a ham hock and chicken stock.’ Well, in that case you might as well use commercial pintos.”

The best staples make a virtue of blandness. They quiet the mind. The nuttiness in rice, the mineral in a potato, the hint of chocolate in a Rio Zape bean are all the better for being barely there. They make your senses reach out to them. (That's why turnips, sweet and faintly bitter, don't quite cut it; they have too much going on.) The conundrum, for a seller of heirloom beans, is that those qualities are the opposite of what he's advertising. To get people to pay three times the cost of store-bought beans, Sando needs to convince them that his are dramatically different. That canned beans are a travesty by comparison. Yet to expect a burst of flavor from a Moro is to miss the point.

Sando fished a few beans from the pot with a wooden spoon. He blew on them to see if their skin split and curled back—the sign that they were done—then gave them to me. They tasted like a cross between black beans and pintos, with just a trace of the Cuban oregano. Had I made them at home, I would have added more salt. Maybe some cumin. And then maybe some cilantro and a squeeze of lime. But they turned out to be just right as they were: the perfect foil for the cow's-foot soup. “There's something miraculous about turning this rock into something that tastes good,” Sando said.

Sando likes to tell a story about a field trial at the University of California, Davis, a few years ago. The school's agronomists had laid out test plots of hybrid beans bred for every

possible attribute: shelf life, yield, insect resistance, disease resistance. They scanned the fields digitally with drones, then counted the percentage of green pixels to quantify each variety's growth. They used infrared cameras to show how much water the leaves were retaining—an indication of heat- and drought-resistance. But when Sando asked about taste, the agronomists drew

a blank. They hadn't tested for that.

To Sando, this was unforgivable. But how different are heirloom beans, really? How much do Lupe's Moros owe to the cook and the setting—to the skylit dining room and the green Oaxacan pottery, the colonial architecture and the swallows in the fig trees—and how much to their untampered genes? Sando's chief counterpart in this

WE FOUND THE BODY OF A YOUNG DEER ONCE

Whitetails flicker like light in the winter woods,
where my dog and I crack open
the early morning, the ground a frozen patchwork
of leaves, the brittle ice of dirt. So much
of walking is description. Late in the year
the sun stops us cold. Or, walking is comparison,
these woods in New Jersey seem

(a passing thought) Ohioan,
then I recall that late thaw

one March in New Hampshire. Or,

I'm ten again wondering where
I last saw the deer carcass. Maybe

by the creek, maybe loose ribs, a skull
tucked into snow.

As children

we set old logs against a middling elm,
thatched branches
into a sort of rooftop, called our dwelling
Antelope. My friend and I, we ignored the sky
cutting into our shelter and made walls
of found particleboard,

fragmentary, damp, worthless as kindling.

Her mother worshipped Zoroaster. Her father

had an Irish-American mistress. Stub of birch, first rime
graying the last moss,
the ground fascinates a spray
of blue jays.

Her father, as a university student, had dined with the Shah.
Whenever her mother polished the silver we'd joke,
“The Shah is coming to tea!”

From upstairs

we could smell duck stewing in walnuts

and pomegranate syrup. Later, the darkest meat
fell to pieces onto bright, particulate rice.

It was like eating a secret, my mouth
stunned by acid sweetness, a terrible hunger
I could not explain to my own mother.
I wanted more, another plate of *fesenjan*, please—

instead: into the winter woods we ran
after this new world
that knew nothing of what we hid

on our tongues—other words for dusk,
revolution, and snow.

We dismissed our appetites. We forgot our fathers.

Farther, farther, I am going into the dark

of the mind, that neighbor girl, my friend—she goes
by Mrs. Bell now, so I hear, lives out west,
plants tulips every November and come spring
scythes each one mid-stem.

A crystal vase in the breakfast nook.

Cheerios in her sons' bowls, her dumb accomplished husband nodding
at the clock.

It was with her I found
the body of a young deer, fallen in a clearing,

fresh snow
powdering the deer's coat like fresh ash
fallen from a proximate fire.

Quiet,

quieter than I've ever been

with anyone, we shared the death, we stood quietly, the sky

open and gray above us.

We never said a word about the deer. I imagine that winter
as helming decay, the woods

beastly, skeletal, far reach of the trees,
the deer's bone-cage
stripped clean of flesh.

She showed me a map of Iran
in my father's world atlas. In Tehran, they had had
many servants, including a gardener and a

night nurse for her and her brother,
though she was too young
to remember any of this.

The day after solstice I note
an emerald shine to the pale sky.

On the question of origin, she explained, "Persian."

Once I described my mother as always angry
(she was born amid a civil war), but mostly

my childhood was a quiet one. It was not
until years later that I learned
others had considered our family strange.

—Jennifer Chang

debate is Paul Gepts, a professor of plant sciences at Davis. Gepts is a small Belgian man of seemingly indeterminate age (he is sixty-four), with a bottlebrush mustache and bespectacled eyes that glint with suppressed humor. Physically, he's a smaller, paler version of Sando—the navy bean to the other man's lima. When I asked Gepts if beans were his primary focus, he smiled

and murmured, "I am Mr. Bean." The following week, he gave the keynote address at the International Bean Conference in Brazil.

Gepts takes a fatherly pride in his subjects. On the bookcase in his office, jars of beans sit side by side with pictures of his son. He keeps an eye on Rancho Gordo's Web site, he told me, to see which beans are selling and to

intervene in the forums sometimes, to correct an especially wrongheaded post. But he doesn't segregate beans as Sando does—into heirloom and industrial, authentic and engineered varieties. To Gepts, their entire history is a genetic experiment. His research has shown that beans were domesticated twice: in Mesoamerica, where their wild forebears evolved, and in the Andes. Mesoamerican beans are smaller and rounder, Andean beans more kidney-shaped. Mesoamerican varieties tend to be more prolific, Andean varieties more colorful. Pinto, navy, and black beans are Mesoamerican. Cranberry, cannellini, and large lima beans are Andean. "I can see just by looking at them which ones are which," Gepts said.

To a bean breeder, the difference is more than academic. Mesoamerican and Andean beans have different yields and tolerances; they get different diseases and thrive in different climates. Crossbreed them one way and you can consolidate their best traits in a single bean; crossbreed them in another way and you may get a "lethal line" that withers on the vine. (Mesoamerican and Andean beans tend not to cross well.) Building better beans is more than just a commercial enterprise, Gepts says. It's essential to feeding the world. In some African countries, beans represent almost half of the protein that people eat, and they're sometimes smuggled across borders to meet demand.

Later that day, Gepts drove me out to the university's experimental farm, where some new breeds were being tested for drought resistance. Eight bean varieties had been crossed with one another for three generations, producing nine hundred and sixty genetic lines, each marked by a little stick in the dirt. Half of the plots were well watered and green; the other half were parched and yellow. Gepts stepped over to a row of scraggly-looking tepary beans and cracked open a pod. "This is the bean that can most beat the drought," he said, pointing to the hard black seeds inside. "The question is, why don't people eat them?"

The answer seems obvious to Sando. "Have you tasted those beans?" he asked me later. "Blech!" But Gepts says it's not that simple. Four years ago, he and some colleagues conducted a taste test

of garbanzo beans. They asked a panel of ten plant breeders, seed brokers, food technicians, and other professionals to rate sixteen varieties according to seven criteria: size, flavor, texture, color, consistency, wholeness, and skin condition. The only things they couldn't agree on were flavor and texture. The loss of flavor to industrial farming can be "an issue," Gepts admitted. But it's hard to quantify. Unlike tomatoes, say, which are picked green and bred tough for transport, beans can ripen on the vine and stay sturdy once dried. A mealy pink tomato tastes nothing like the crimson fruit at a farmers' market. A store-bought bean still tastes like a bean.

Sando says that he can easily tell the differences among varieties—some black beans are creamy, for instance, others more starchy or meaty—not to mention the difference between freshly dried beans like his and those that have languished on a supermarket shelf. "And if your point of reference is the canned kidney bean at a salad bar, I totally understand if you hate beans," he said. The chef Enrique Olvera goes further. A bean grown in an industrial field tastes nothing like the same bean grown at a small farm where crops are rotated, he says. Yet those differences may have little to do with how much we like a bean. When I asked chefs about their favorite bean dishes, they invariably went back to their childhood. Olvera talked about the black beans that his grandmother cooked with a little lime, amachito pepper, and Mexican coriander. David Breeden, the chef de cuisine at the French Laundry, recalled the pinto beans and corn bread that his mother made in eastern Tennessee. (The version that he served me at the restaurant was the single best thing in a meal of small astonishments.) Even Thomas Keller, a famously fastidious cook, waxed nostalgic about the white-bean soup that his mother used to make. "She would just take some canned beans and chicken stock and purée them," he told me. "It didn't require a lot of attention, because the beans didn't have a lot of integrity, but it made this wonderful, velvety soup."

Bean eaters are creatures of habit. "It's very marked," Gepts said. "In Colombia, they like big red beans. In Venezuela, they like small black beans. It's

all about which beans you grew up with." For a breeder, that means the one trait you can't mess with is appearance. "With wheat, the husks may look different or the seeds may be different shapes, but they'll get ground into flour eventually," Gepts said. "That's not true with beans." He stepped over to another row of plants and snapped open a pod. "Not white enough," he said. Then he reached across to the next row. These plants were especially lush, and their seeds were among the most beautiful I'd seen: glossy and olive brown, with a shimmering stripe like a tiger's-eye gem. Gepts shook his head. "It's not a commercial plant," he said, tossing a pod into the weeds. "People want beans to look the way they've always looked."

The Flower of the Peach was like no bean Sando had ever seen. This made it irresistible to him—"I'm a whore," he told me. "My favorite bean is always the last one I ate"—but not necessarily to his customers. For all his efforts on behalf of Mexican beans, three-quarters of his sales are still for European varieties. His top sellers are Royal Coronas, followed by cassoulet, flageolet, cranberry, and Marcella beans. "There are total Mexican-bean addicts, but a lot of people will never buy them," he said, as we drove to meet the Flor de Durazno farmers. "Which irritates me. They're twenty-five per cent of my sales but forty per cent of my time."

If anything can grow in Napa, very little seems to grow in most of Hidalgo.



It's Mexican cowboy country, though cattle seem to like it no better than crops do. In the small towns between ranches, lanky men in straw hats lean in shady doorways, waiting for their feed orders to be filled, their boots to be reheelled. It's a landscape of relentless sun and little water, where the fields look like empty lots, scattered with gravel. In Napa, the fog rolls in from

the Pacific every morning to wet the plants, then parts obligingly for the sun in the afternoon. In the San Joaquin Valley, beans are harvested by a machine called Big Bertha, which can pick and thresh fifty thousand pounds a day. In Hidalgo, the harvests are done mostly by hand. When I asked one farmer if it was hard to plant in such rocky soil, he said, "No, no, we like the rocks. We pile them around the seedlings to shield them from the sun."

Sando's growers lived in a village north of Ixmiquilpan, past a small school for indigenous Nahuatl speakers, on a dirt road with goats scampering about. The compound was hidden behind a tall palisade of cactus and purple bougainvillea. When we arrived, three men in jeans and denim work shirts came out to greet us: a father, son, and uncle, with a few small boys peeking from behind them. They'd stretched a blue plastic tarp above a picnic table in the courtyard, and their wives and daughters were setting out charro beans and fresh tortillas. There followed a good deal of halting, touchingly formal talk about harvests and the maddening intermittence of rain. The toughest part of working with Mexican farmers, Sando had told me, is their circumspection. "They're so polite, and we're used to being so direct," he said. "If my bookkeeper forgets to pay for a crop, the farmer might say, 'It's been really hard lately. We've been eating a lot of cactus.' It's only after a while that I'll realize, 'Oh, you mean you didn't get the check!'"

Rancho Gordo pays its Mexican farmers anywhere from five to thirty per cent above the market rate, Quiroz says. But when I asked the farmers about their prices and yields for the Flor de Durazno, an awkward, side-glancing silence ensued. "It's universal among farmers," Sando interjected. "Yield is connected to self-worth." García huddled with the men for a moment, then whispered something to Quiroz, who came over to us. "Would you mind if we all had a beer together? Gabriel says they're getting nervous."

These were tentative, fragile relationships, Sando told me later, with men who'd been screwed over again and again by buyers. The best way to keep their trust was to bring money year after

year and not to ask too many questions. “At some point, it’ll be nice to look back and say we helped them pave their roads, but we’re not there yet,” he said. “We’re still in the middle of this. They’re not stable, we’re not stable. And it’s been ten years. So it’s the farmer’s job to get as much as he can, and I need to get the price as low as I can. We both need to win.” He shrugged. “I’m not a saint. I’m here to make a profit. I don’t want to save the world with beans.”

After the jugs had been emptied and the plates cleared, the farmers clapped García on the back and climbed into a pickup truck. Aside from a small cup of peach-colored beans that they’d passed round, there had been no sign of Sando’s order. We followed the farmers out to a small storage shed on the outskirts of the village, and they motioned for us to join them. Inside, ten bulging nylon bags stood stacked in a corner, each filled with two hundred pounds of Flor de Durazno beans. They’d been there all along.

Driving back to the hacienda that afternoon with Quiroz and García, Sando seemed, for just a moment, content. His sales were growing by a steady fifteen to twenty per cent a year. The Bean Club had a waiting list of more than five hundred, and he was thinking of reopening it in the spring. (When he launched a Facebook group for the club last August, it was flooded with recipes and pictures. Sample comment: “HOLY CRAP, these beans were good.”) Yet Sando still mistrusted his success. “My father always said, ‘If you’re coasting, you’re going downhill.’”

These bean adventures were getting harder to organize, he said. In the early years, the three of them could travel wherever they wanted. The goal was just to get lost. Now drug violence had reached such a pitch—nearly thirty thousand murders in 2017, higher even than at the peak of Mexico’s drug wars, in 2011—that entire states were off limits. “Parts of Michoacán aren’t safe at all,” Sando said. “Same thing with Veracruz. I have friends in Puebla, but for the first time I don’t feel comfortable going there at night.” Two years earlier, on their way to an indigenous sugar cooperative in San Luis Potosí, they’d been pinned down for four hours by



“Sometimes you act like you’re the only narcissist in this marriage.”

federal agents, who were pursuing some narcos ahead. More recently, the skulls of more than two hundred and fifty people, probably victims of drug cartels, had been found in a mass grave in Veracruz, near a house the trio used to rent. The last time they stayed there, Sando said, the electricity went out inexplicably one night. “And I thought, Oh, this is how I die.”

Perhaps the wiser move was to pare down Rancho Gordo’s offerings, focus on what sold best. “New strategy!” Sando said. “Just please the bean freaks.” Yet he kept dreaming of new varieties: Icatone white beans from the Tarahumara peoples in Chihuahua, or pearl-gray Frijolon de Zimatlán from Oaxaca, or, best of all, the Rosa de Castilla from Michoacán. “It’s my Moby Dick,” he said. “Just to look at those beans makes my knees buckle. And they’re absolutely delicious—velvety but light, with a great bean broth.” The narcos were a problem, true. But García might be able to source the beans through an avocado grower he knew, or a local restaurant owner. Or maybe they should

go to the city of Juchitán, on the Pacific Coast, where some Zapotecan men identify as a third gender, known as muxe, and dress and behave like women. They have a four-day festival every November, called La Vela de las Auténticas Intrépidas Buscadoras del Peligro, or the Vigil of the Authentic, Intrepid Danger-Seekers. Sando grinned. “And they have great beans!”

A few months later, back in Brooklyn, a small box arrived on my doorstep. The label bore the Rancho Gordo logo, with a Mexican starlet licking her lips. I found the usual Bean Club bounty inside: one-pound bags of Alubia Blanca and Domingo Rojo, Yellow Indian Woman, and, buried at the bottom, the Flor de Durazno. I cooked them simply, as Sando and Lupe had taught me—though I made an ancho-chili salsa on the side, just in case. When I served them later, Evangeline glanced down at her bowl with a familiar look of resignation. She took one bite, then another, then turned to me with her eyebrows slightly raised. “They’re really delicious,” she said. “For beans.” ♦

A Flawless Silence



Yiyun Li

A few times a year, around major Chinese holidays, Min received an e-mail from a man whom she had met twice in her life. Every November—after the celebration of another birthday, on November 3rd, he never failed to remind her—he also attached a picture of himself, and begged for a picture of her. In the past twelve years, the number of his grandchildren had quadrupled. His oldest grandson had graduated from college and taken a good job in New York City. The next two grandchildren were in college. There were a few more, mostly on the West Coast. The youngest, a boy born with a noble look, the man had nicknamed J.C., for Julius Caesar. In 2012, his wife had died, but he was healthy in general, minus some common conditions that plagued old people—high blood pressure and faulty short-term memory. There were other details in his e-mails: a week of vacation in Hawaii, a couple new to the farmers' market who worked as elementary-school teachers but sold blueberries on weekends, a favorite restaurant closing because of a rent hike. Most people would have written long ago with a stern reply, telling the sender to stop e-mailing; most people would have blocked him had he persisted.

"I turned eighty-four last week," the most recent message began. "I was born in the Year of the Monkey. I'm attaching a family picture taken on the day of my birthday. If my memory is still good, you were born in the Year of the Rat, so you're forty-four. Can you send me a picture of you so I can see what you look like now?"

It had been 3 A.M. when the man, who lived in a suburb of Seattle, in a retirement facility five minutes from his eldest son's family, wrote Min, who lived just south of San Francisco. Min had chronic insomnia, and checking her phone when she couldn't sleep exacerbated the condition. It was bad enough that the man had filled the void of his night calculating Min's age. It was much worse that the message had ambushed her during her own wakefulness. She thought of telling the man to leave her alone. You're a nuisance, she rehearsed, and you should be ashamed of yourself.

But in the morning, as Min drove the twins to school, she was glad she

had not responded. Perhaps the man would die between this month and the next, or between this year and the next. Min looked forward to the day his e-mails stopped coming: for once, she would win a battle through silence.

"Mommy, tell Emmie she's wrong," Deanna said.

"Mommy, tell Deanna she's wrong."

The previous day, the girls had reported the addition of two new chicks in the school garden, Pancake and Waffle, thus named because the gardening teacher could not tell them apart. Emmie was insisting that after cleaning the coop she could tell the difference between the two. Deanna was sensibly pointing out that the chick Emmie called Pancake might have been Waffle in the first place.

Min said that they were both right, adding "in a way"—a phrase she used often when the girls were in disagreement. They refuted her at once in a joint effort.

"Shall we change the subject?" Min said.

"Amelia said she used to think pepper spray was a condiment," Deanna said.

"Amelia's middle name is some pasta's name," Emmie said.

"No, a cheese's name," Deanna said.

"It may be both," Min said. In a way, she thought, everything can be something else.

"Kevin is Republican," Emmie said.

Min must have missed something. "How do you know?"

"He wrote a letter to Trump," Emmie said.

"And said, 'Dear Mr. Trump, I'm your supporter, but could you be a better person so more people will like you?'" Deanna said. "Everyone else wrote to Hillary."

Min looked at the twins in the rear-view mirror. They nodded back convincingly. It turned out, when she questioned further, that the day before, during an activity called "Understanding the Election Results," the third graders had all written a letter to either Mrs. Clinton or Mr. Trump.

Sandra, Kevin's mother, was in tears when Min ran into her in the school parking lot. Had she heard this talk about Kevin's being Republican, Sandra asked, and Min admitted that she

had. "I told the teacher to take his letter down from the display," Sandra said. "She should have checked with me first. He has no idea what it means to be Republican."

"There's no real harm done," Min said.

"All the kids will tell their parents, if they haven't already," Sandra said, and then, before a group of parents reached them, "Let's go get coffee."

Sandra and Min had served on the school's hospitality committee for the past two years, and, before that, on the lice-buster team. They got along because Sandra could make the smallest encounter in a grocery store into a story with a beginning and a middle and an end, and Min liked to listen. Sandra reminded Min of her mother, who, though widowed young, had never lost her fondness for storytelling, and had always been quick to laugh.

Min had not inherited her mother's storytelling abilities. When the twins were in kindergarten, their teacher had chastised Min. "They're strong readers," the teacher had said, "but in this country we have a tradition of reading to our children even if they can read by themselves. It's a bonding experience."

"In this country" did not sound like something that someone in a progressive school in California would say, and Min decided not to heed the teacher's comment. When the girls read together, they acted out each page with more liveliness than Min could offer. If the teacher talked to her again, she'd say she was hoping to foster her daughters' creativity, "creativity" being a versatile password.

Now, over coffee, Sandra recounted Election Night. "Even before they started counting, I had this pit in my stomach. I went upstairs and worked on Kevin's Halloween costume. Something was wrong with it, I thought. One of Pikachu's ears looked crooked. Kevin said, Mommy, it's already past Halloween, and I said I wanted to make the thing right so that we could donate it. But the more I worked on it the worse it looked. Then Chuck came in, and I heard him yelling. He's winning! he said. He's winning! Why isn't the TV on? Kevin went downstairs while Chuck kept on and on: Didn't I tell you he'd win? Didn't I say that? You didn't believe me, did you? I knew if I didn't go downstairs he would go on yelling like that all night, so I



"We grow all our own bad-tasting ugly things."

went down and told Kevin it was his bedtime. He said it was early and he wanted to watch TV with his dad. And Chuck said, For God's sake, what's wrong with you? Let him stay up and celebrate with me."

There had been no raised voices in Min's house. Neither she nor Rich, her husband, had discussed the election results; neither had lost a moment of composure. Min had never revealed to Sandra that Rich was a Trump supporter. Chuck owned a company that dealt in cleaning supplies, a business that had been in the family for three generations. Rich, who had grown up in a poor neighborhood in Beijing and who had long ago given up his Chinese name, worked at a tech startup. Each man would think that the other deserved little respect. Was there any good in sharing with Sandra that both their husbands had been among the twenty per cent in their county who had voted for Trump? Humiliation would not bring people closer.

Sandra said that she had called Chuck a bigot to his face, and he had called her an equally bad name. Min had not called Rich anything denigrating. He had married her because she was not the kind of woman who would use strong words. They had talked about the election only once—these days,

their conversation rarely ventured out of the safety zone of children and grocery lists and holiday plans. Rich had made a long, fervid speech in favor of Trump, and when Min had simply said she was going to vote for Clinton he had called her brainwashed. "The longer a woman's hair is, the shorter her sight is," he said, quoting his favorite Chinese saying, which had also been his father's favorite and, before that, his grandfather's.

"Don't you sometimes want someone's death so much that you almost believe the person could die just because of your wish?" Min said now.

"I'm sure you're not the only one who feels that way."

"Oh..." Min said. She wasn't thinking about Trump, she admitted.

"Who are you talking about? Not Rich, I hope."

"Oh, no."

"Then who?"

It was unkind of her to wish an old man a speedy death. Min quickly said something about a novel she was reading and how she wished she could strangle a character in it. That was a poor lie. Sandra would have pressed more if not for her own trouble. Too bad no other children would pronounce themselves Kevin's allies. Min had warned the twins never to mention that their

father was a Trump supporter, and they had replied that of course they wouldn't be so stupid.

The man who would not stop writing to Min had, in a way, been responsible for her marriage, but whenever this thought occurred to her she would remind herself that nobody had forced her into marrying Rich.

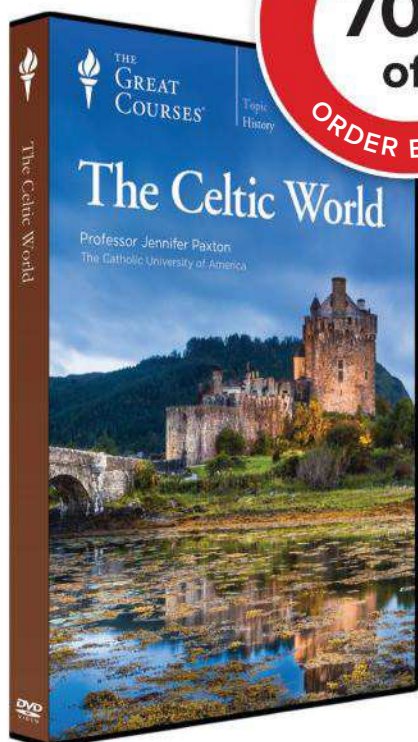
Min was nineteen when she first met the man, who had been introduced to her as a potential father-in-law. He was a linguistics professor at a prominent university in Beijing, and he had three sons in America. The eldest, according to the matchmaker, worked for Microsoft, and he was the one the family had in mind for Min, but if that didn't work out there were two other sons.

Min hadn't shown much academic promise. She had attended a vocational school that trained girls to become secretaries. After graduation, she had worked in a department store. Why would any of those boys need to find a wife in China when they're already in America? she asked her mother. You're asking the blind for directions, her mother said, but I would say that they can't possibly find someone as good as you in America.

America, Min could see, was alluring to her mother. Min's father had died during her second year of middle school, in an accident at the steel plant where he had worked since he was eighteen. After his death, Min and her mother had lived frugally on the money her mother made running a newsstand. The compensation for her father's accident had been saved by her mother as Min's dowry.

Min had once had a brief schoolgirl crush, but she had never dated. She was good-looking—not in a striking way, but she had a classic look, like a figure in a Ming-dynasty painting or a period movie, her shoulders narrowing compliantly, her neck long, her complexion clear, her eyes and nose and mouth arranged in a pleasing manner.

Min had grown up thinking she was born into a role as a flawless daughter, and someday she would become a flawless daughter-in-law, wife, and mother. It turned out that she was none of these, yet she couldn't see where she had fallen short. No one was perfect, she knew, but women in books and films often



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seemed flawed in a meaningful or attractive way. The other mothers at the school, when they were unhappy, had a sensible reason: a husband's affair, a child's diagnosis, a power shift on the school-auction committee.

Perhaps they all lived in giant doll houses. Some, like the dolls that belonged to Emmie and Deanna, had complicated life stories, with many plots and dramas and excitements. Others were like the only doll Min had had when she was young—a little creature made of hard plastic, with unbending arms and legs connected to a torso through ball sockets. Min had carried the doll around dutifully, but she had never made up a story for it. The only catastrophe that had befallen the doll had occurred on a winter night. Min had left it on a windowsill, and a power outage caused the temperature in the apartment to drop. For reasons that neither she nor her parents understood, one of the doll's legs had disconnected from its socket and could not be put back.

The one-legged doll remained in her possession. Min did not remember ever feeling sad about the severed limb. A doll was a doll. She had not been a sentimental child.

Min had agreed with her mother that it wouldn't hurt to meet the professor. At nineteen, she was the kind of girl some parents wanted for their sons: pretty, meek, experienced enough with hardship not to be dreamily naïve, yet not broody, either, even after losing her father.

Min and her mother met the man at the matchmaker's apartment on a Sunday. They had tea together until the matchmaker suggested that she and Min's mother take a walk in a nearby park. Left alone with the man, Min did not know what she was expected to do to earn his approval. He looked like a professor from a film, with his wire-rimmed glasses and impeccably parted silver hair. When he asked her questions, he used words her father would never have used. What's your outlook on the world? What do you do to maximize your potential? When she did not know what to say, he said that the process of enlightening and perfecting oneself was like rowing a boat up a river. He then brought out a set of textbooks, called "New Concept English," and

NOT A MILE

from where my students ask me
why Sylvia Plath wanted to eat men,
two men overdose. This is rural Ohio,
and the new drugs from Columbus
are cut with elephant tranquilizers.
The police are nurses now.
They don't dream. My students try
to understand why the voice
in the poem brags about death but
never dies. Not a mile from here,
two men regain consciousness
in their living room full of litter boxes
and Optimos. They are not particularly scared
by the police or their I.V.s. They have both
died before, and been revived with Narcan.
It's November 6th, and the sky
has been blank for so long its emptiness
has turned supple. The men refuse
further medical treatment. One dumps
a baggie of crickets into a lizard tank.
My students are sincerely trying
to analyze death: its cadence and anaphora,
its German origins. The police
do not know how to speak
to my students. They bark and lord
over a scuffle or jaywalking
because they are used to hauling the dead
back to life and fishing names
out of their mouths. They cannot help
but see everyone as needing to be saved
by force. Not a mile from where my students
show me outlines of what they are trying
to say about resurrection, one of the men
pulls a phone out of his mesh shorts
and calls Columbus. My students worry
they cannot explain where Plath ends
and death begins. Not a mile
from our classroom, men dissolve
like powder in water. Men so close
we can't see them. Men like air.

—Andrew Grace

asked which level Min thought she was. She had never heard of the textbooks, and the man, looking at her over his glasses, told her that if she wanted to go to America she should start studying English right away.

Min thought she had failed the interview. She didn't much care.

The man moved next to her on the sofa and opened the second book in the series. He asked her to repeat after him

the first lesson, titled "A Private Conversation." Her body tensed at the closeness of their shoulders and thighs as they bent over the book.

Perhaps he had been acting only out of fatherliness, she tried to convince herself afterward. He had left the books with her and insisted that she call him the following weekend. He would arrange his schedule so that he could tutor her, he said, a plan he didn't bring

up with the matchmaker or Min's mother. Instead, he told them that his son would come home for a summer visit, and then the two young people could properly meet.

Min never made the call. They did not have a telephone at home, and she hated to use public phones. Even when the professor expressed an urgent wish to talk with her through the matchmaker, she remained silent. The books he'd loaned to her she buried under old newspapers. After a few weeks, she was able to pretend that she had never met the man, whose fingers had lingered on her arm for a moment too long when he had said goodbye.

One day, Min's mother told her that the professor had decided that she wasn't a good choice. Not diligent or smart enough for his intellectual family. This verdict had been conveyed to her mother by the matchmaker.

"Did you see the photo he showed us?" Min's mother said. "His son is not yet thirty and already going bald. If this professor worried that you would not give him intellectual grandchildren, I'd be equally concerned that his Microsoft son would give me ugly grandchildren."

Known as "the orphan and the widow" to friends and neighbors, Min and her mother had maintained the solemnness required by their titles, but when nobody was around they had had many things to laugh about together.

At dinner a few days later, Emmie brought up Kevin's reputation as a Republican, already cemented, it seemed, among their classmates. "Everyone feels bad for him," Emmie said.

"I don't," Deanna said. "You feel bad for him because you have a crush on him."

"I don't think you are old enough to talk about boys or politics," Rich said.

"You're so ageist," Emmie said.

Min could sense Rich's impatience, but he only gave Emmie a cold look before turning to Deanna and asking her about her day. He had mellowed over the years. Their eldest child, Max, had grown up with a more unforgiving and volatile father, and right after college Max had moved to Singapore. Min did not feel his absence keenly, though she thought that as a mother

she should have done better at missing him. She had had Max at twenty-one, and the motherhood that had come too early had turned into a blur over the years. She had loved her son, still loved him—of this much she was certain, though she didn't know if she liked him. Can you love a person without liking him? Max and Rich had a fraught relationship, but they viewed the world similarly. For both, failing to calculate the price of every move in life was a character flaw; not taking advantage of someone else was a sin.

Sometimes Min pitied her future daughter-in-law, whoever she was, and wished that the girl could have chosen more wisely.

Conceiving another child had been Rich's solution to a marriage on the cusp of dissolution ten years ago. Divorce would be a disaster for everyone, he'd argued coolly: Max, who would experience adolescence with unnecessary turmoil; Rich, who would face a financial setback; and Min, too—most definitely, as he would do anything to minimize his loss and maximize hers. Min knew that Rich meant everything he said. Assets would be transferred back to China, to avoid alimony; custody of Max would be fought for. But Rich didn't know that she wanted neither his money nor his son—for a short period, she had found a strange relief in this thought. She could manage a simple life on the part-time salary she earned as a bookkeeper at Max's former preschool.

But what kind of mother would so readily give up a child? If she didn't love her husband enough, at least she should try to love her child better. Perhaps it wasn't a bad idea to have another baby. Motherhood was like one of those contracts that were automatically renewed. As long as you did nothing, a charge would show up on your credit card. What's wrong, though, with letting the automatic take over one's life?

"Explain to me some of the dangers if Clinton had been elected," Rich said to the girls now. Min wouldn't mind a silent meal, but Rich believed in dinner conversations. A preparation

for the children to excel in the real world. "If you can't imagine that, you don't have a right to talk about politics at this table."

Emmie stuck her tongue out. Deanna, Rich's favorite—a fact she knew, as he had told her she was smarter than her sister and her mother combined—folded her hands under her chin. "What are the dangers, Daddy?"

"For instance, any boy could have used the girls' bathroom at school if he wanted," Rich said. "How would you have liked that?"

"I thought we agreed not to talk about politics," Min said.

"Except when I need to instruct my children," Rich said.

Abruptly Min stood up and went to the kitchen, where she rummaged through the refrigerator as though she had forgotten something. On the counter there was a bottle of wine that Rich had brought home earlier, reading the label to her and telling her the price; he wanted something special, he said, when a couple of friends came over on Saturday to celebrate the election. She thought of nudging the bottle off the counter. He would tell the girls to go to their bedroom if he wanted to yell at her. She would say it was an accident, and he would say no one believed that, and, even if it had been an accident, it was unforgivable. It's only a bottle of wine, she would say, and she didn't need his forgiveness

for such trifles. He would say something else, but they would be cut short by Emmie, who was not as good as Deanna at waiting out a storm. Why are you guys arguing? Emmie would say, and Rich would try to soften his voice and say that they were having a grownup discussion.

About what? Emmie would say. About the fundamental difference between us, Min would answer. Are you going to divorce? Emmie would ask. No, of course not, they would say together.

Yet this scenario, which Min had seen in films, would never happen in her family. She and Rich had both come into the marriage without any fantasy about the other. Could love



find a place in a marriage if it had not started with some degree of fantasy? They were realistic people, and marriage was weather. They lived in it without any desire to control it or change it. They knew each other well enough to know the forecast.

A few weeks after Min had met the professor, her mother had told her that a young man, who was working in America and was home for a visit, was interested in meeting her. "And this time," her mother said, "I've asked about his parents. They're just like us, not intellectuals."

A mail-order bride, Min thought of herself much later, even though she and Rich had dated long-distance through letters and phone calls for eight months. She did not dislike him, though she'd never reread his letters, which often included lists of instructions. "You are what you wear," he wrote in one letter, going on to explain the importance of dressing in brand-name clothes and shoes "to boost your status and confidence." "Anyone who does not set his heart on getting rich should be ashamed of himself," he wrote in another. "Especially in America." On the phone, he prompted Min to study English and refresh her math skills, as his plan was to enroll her in an accounting program at a community college. From there, she could either find a stable government job with a good pension or, if she was ambitious and smart, join a company or a firm that would pay better.

Rich came from a background similar to Min's. His father worked in the boiler room of a municipal bathhouse, and his mother in a high-school cafeteria. Rich could have turned out like many of his childhood friends, apprenticing at a factory after middle school. What had stopped him from going down that path was his fifth-grade teacher. Rich first told Min the story during one of their long-distance phone calls, and had since enjoyed repeating it to her and their children.

In the story, Rich and some friends had played truant one afternoon. The next day, the teacher, instead of giving them the usual punishment of extra work, made the boys stand in front of the class, and then asked the other pu-

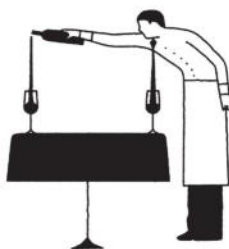
pils to imagine what the boys would look like in twenty or thirty years.

When no one spoke, the teacher turned to the boys. "All of you will end up like those men sitting out in the alleyways on a summer evening," she said, "shirtless, stomachs folded over your belts, a beer or a cigarette in your hands, having nothing better to do than yell at your wives and children so that you can feel good about yourselves. If your parents aren't ashamed of you, I assure you, your children will be."

Rich always ended his story by quoting the teacher, but Min knew there was more to it. His father had been one of those men. Her own father would have been described similarly. She might have married a man like that had she stayed in Beijing. Perhaps it was wrong to say there had not been any fantasy. Rich had offered her a change of scenery. She had offered him the possibility of offspring, who would admire and worship him.

When Min and Rich agreed, in a phone call, to get married, her mother asked her if she was sure.

Min lied and said yes. What made her decision clear, even before Rich had brought up the subject of marriage, was a visit from the professor. Her mother had been at her newsstand, and when Min opened the door the professor came into the apartment as though she had been expecting him. He studied



the old furniture and the twelve-inch black-and-white television before turning to her. "I've been waiting for your call," he said. "You didn't keep your promise."

All of a sudden, it felt childish to pretend she had never met the man. Childish, too, to think he would forget that she still had his books. Min pulled them out from under the newspapers and tried to come up with a sensible apology, but he cut her off. "I've

come to set up a regular time to meet so you can study English with me."

Min thanked him and said that there was no need.

"Why not? You can't lower your standards because of the way you were brought up."

"I thought you decided I wasn't a good match for your son," Min said.

"But I've had a change of heart. You're like jadeite. Less sympathetic people would think of you as a common rock, but you are not. Someone like me, someone who understands your value, has to make you into a polished masterpiece."

Min stepped back, but the professor moved closer, his hand resting on her shoulder, his thumb touching her collarbone. "Do you understand?" he said. "I can do a lot for you."

"I'm sorry, but I don't need your help."

"Why? Even my graduate students don't get this kind of attention from me."

Min shook her head. His fingers clutched her shoulder more tightly. "But I'm dating someone now," she said.

"What do you mean you're dating someone? Only two months ago you agreed to marry my son."

"I didn't."

"Why else did you meet me? Who is this man you're dating? Remember, I can help you go to America."

"I'm dating someone in America," Min said. "I'll marry him."

The anger in the man's eyes was not the anger of a concerned father—even at nineteen, Min could tell that. The resentment was that of a betrayed lover. "So you were only using me, but now you found someone better you can use," he said. "I should've known that girls like you have no honor to speak of."

Another girl would have laughed in his face and called him a lunatic. Another girl would have shaken off his hand and shown him the door. "I'm sorry if I'm disappointing you," Min said. "I can't help it."

"Of course you can. I can still teach you English. You don't have to marry my son. Just come and visit me. Say yes."

It was the helplessness of his plea that made Min cringe with pity. She did not want the power he'd handed her. It was not really power but an obligation or, worse, a debt. The moment

he'd laid his eyes on her she owed him something. Still, she could not help feeling bad for him. You're making a fool of yourself, she wanted to say. I'm only a girl, without any status or importance. Why are you embarrassing yourself like this?

Over the years, Min had tried hard not to think about that moment. But when the man's e-mails came she often had an urge to tell her younger self, It's not he who made a fool of himself but you. It's you who hastened into a marriage because you thought it was better to marry a man who would not act with such folly. You thought that a man without a crazed look in his eyes would be the right husband, but perhaps a marriage should be more like an illness that the couple agrees to submit to so that they can recover together. Some succeed, others fail, yet two people can't remain in their separate afflictions and hope for the best.

Listen, I don't want you to discuss politics with the girls," Rich said to Min after the twins went to bed that night.

Min did not reply.

"I don't want my children to be exposed to this left-wing crap."

The same conversation would take place in Sandra's house, though it would be a more heated fight, with words of passion being thrown back and forth like grenades. Yet Sandra would stay married to Chuck, just as Min would stay married to Rich.

"And, for the record," Rich continued, "if they ask you how you voted, you should either say you voted for Trump or, if you don't want to say that, tell them you didn't vote."

For a moment, Min felt a vindictive joy that the girls already knew to keep the truth about him from the world. In a few years, they would be teen-agers. Emmie would be high-strung, unable to mask her moods. Deanna would be coy, but when she was ready to sabotage her father's authority she would do so with more tact, and with more devastation, too. Perhaps Min could just be patient and wait for the twins to grow up. Her mother might have felt the same way after the death of Min's father: children grow up, and they will solve the problems we can't solve for them.



"We'll offer them religion in exchange for food. If that doesn't work, we'll kill them and take their food in the name of religion."

They would find new problems, too, those they could not solve. You could wait for a harmless man to die, but he would not let loose his grasp, as if you were part of his life.

Max had been in elementary school when the professor first sent Min an e-mail, "to reconnect," as he put it. The previous summer, he said, he had visited Beijing for the first time since moving to America more than a decade earlier, and on a whim had stopped at Min's old apartment building. Surprisingly, he wrote, the complex had not been demolished, and her mother still lived there. "All these signs convinced me that I should get in touch with you again," the professor wrote. "As a lost friend."

He had written out of loneliness or nostalgia, Min had told herself, trying to be kind in her dismissal. All she

had to do was to remain silent. But a silence stoically maintained, she now understood, did not give her any dignity. The next month, the month after next, he would send another e-mail, reminding her that she was never far from the girl he remembered. In his imagination she would still be young, pretty, and malleable. Her silence would do nothing to stop his boundless imagination.

That night, when Min failed to fall asleep, she opened the man's e-mail from the night before. In a large font that she hoped would be easy for him to read, she typed, "Please stop writing me."

Then, on second thought, she erased that, and wrote, "Go to hell." ♦

THE WRITER'S VOICE PODCAST
Yiyun Li reads "A Flawless Silence."

THE CRITICS



POP MUSIC

PUBLIC PRACTICE

More studious than outrageous, Cardi B's "Invasion of Privacy" is a breeze.

BY CARRIE BATTAN

If you need more proof that reality television and social media are this era's greatest cultural incubators, look no further than Cardi B (born Belcalis Almanzar), the twenty-five-year-old Bronx native who has taken an unprecedented but well-documented path to pop-world domination. In 2014, while working as a stripper, she launched a grassroots campaign for her personality on Instagram and Vine, posting bawdy, unflinching videos in which she monologued about whatever was on her mind—unfaithful boyfriends, the indignity of backhanded compliments, the relative merits of IHOP and Philippe Chow—in a thick New York Spanish accent. She sometimes wore nothing but a shower cap. "I ain't gon' lie to y'all, these terrorist attacks got my mental a li'l finicky. That's why I been in the Bronx," she said in one video, from 2015. "Keep me away from downtown. Ain't nobody tryna blow up the hood."

These little gems of street wisdom got her cast in Mona Scott-Young's VH1 reality series "Love & Hip Hop." A chatterbox with a refreshingly unvarnished self-presentation, Cardi, in perhaps her greatest accomplishment, inverts the uses of the platforms she first called home: in her universe, social media and television serve as megaphones for candor and exuberance rather than for deception or artifice.

The music industry, of course, has its own entrenched structures of artifice. No realm of entertainment is littered with more outsiders made quickly into affable cash cows. Cardi, who quit stripping in 2015, decided to try rapping,

despite being more Lucille Ball than Lauryn Hill. It was a canny move. After all, her main skill set—a knack for language and bombast—overlapped nicely with that of most successful hip-hop artists. Her first two mixtapes, "Gangsta Bitch Music," Volumes I and II, from 2016 and 2017, had the feel of rough drafts. She gravitated toward a pummelling street sound, with skittering beats and menacing choruses that didn't always capture the humor and charm she was known for; nonetheless, the efforts were lively. One of her tracks, "Lick," was rereleased in a collaboration with Offset, a member of the chart-topping hip-hop trio Migos, who is now Cardi's fiancé, but it was not until "Bodak Yellow" that she became a legitimate force. That song, a thunderous New York rap record with an off-kilter beat and a threatening mood, elbowed its way to dominance. Rapping had seemed like something of an extracurricular to Cardi's career, but "Bodak Yellow" unseated a Taylor Swift single to become the top song in the country. Cardi was now, astonishingly, the first female rapper to top the *Billboard* Hot 100 chart on a solo track since Hill did, with "Doo Wop (That Thing)," in 1998.

Major labels have typically misused unconventional or Internet-viral talent, but Cardi's debut album, "Invasion of Privacy," which was released earlier this month, signals that perhaps they are developing better strategies. The record is clearly the product of plenty of money and planning, but it bottles her vitality without allowing it to go flat. The record is stacked with appear-

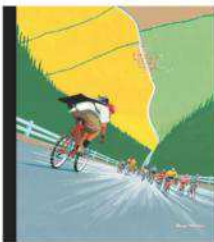
ances by hip-hop and R. & B. A-listers: Migos, Chance the Rapper, YG, Kehlani, and SZA. Such a name-laden track list usually indicates a shameless attempt to search-engine-optimize a bloated body of work, but "Invasion of Privacy" is a mercifully cogent thirteen-song breeze. It mixes hard-slapping street rap with dashes of velvety, heartbroken R. & B. There is also a crafty collaboration with the Colombian pop superstar J Balvin and Latin trap's reigning king, Bad Bunny, on a song called "I Like It," a swaggering update of Pete Rodriguez's Latin-boogaloo hit. Cardi, who grew up on a diet of bachata and reggaeton and has never shed her Bronx accent, is a fitting hip-hop star for an era of Latin-pop crossovers.

Cardi's trajectory has been idiosyncratic, but on her songs she is a traditionalist. She is the first to admit that rapping takes work, and that her progress has required intense study. This makes her an outlier. Hip-hop's prevailing style is heavily improvisational, less about flow and narrative than about hypnotic chants and call-and-response choruses. Most of the biggest stars, particularly those from hip-hop's capital city of Atlanta, do not put raps to paper before recording them; instead, they enter the recording booth when the mood strikes them, building on catchphrases and trying to capture an energy rather than tell a story. These songs have an off-hand, whistle-while-you-work feeling to them. But Cardi, despite the stream of consciousness that characterizes her social-media posts, makes studied,

ABOVE: OLIMPIA ZAGNOLI



Most big hip-hop stars try to capture an energy rather than tell a story. Cardi B's songs, by contrast, are premeditated.



Iconic Style

From classic cartoons to signature covers, the *New Yorker* archive has memorable images for your walls.
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THE
NEW YORKER



"Our maintenance crew is fixing a problem that should only take a few minutes but which will haunt you for the duration of the flight."

premeditated songs. She is a formalist who wears the writing process—and her influences—on her sleeve, which means she is, in a major way, a throwback artist. Cardi adopted the measured but forceful vocal style and cadence of “Bodak Yellow” from “No Flockin,” a hit by the troubled Florida rapper Kodak Black. “Get Up 10,” the first song on “Invasion of Privacy,” is a careful homage to Meek Mill’s bait-and-switch street classic “Dreams and Nightmares,” in which, for ninety seconds, accompanied by a piano and strings, he raps about his triumph over his circumstances, until the turbo-charged beat drops and his voice shifts to a frenzied bark, reminding listeners of his persistent hunger. It’s an important touchstone for the genre, and one that Cardi repurposes for her own rags-to-riches story. In interviews, she has credited Pardison Fontaine as a co-writer of her lyrics, turning what would be a shameful secret for most rappers into a simple fact of her process.

In her videos on social media, Cardi

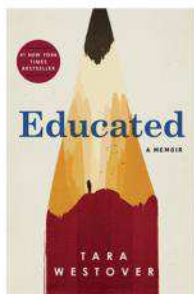
plays a multitude of characters. In some, she’s a proud swindler giving her followers a peek into her bag of tricks. In others, she’s a gross-out comic or a vixen; often she is a hood headmistress, admonishing women for their transgressions or their missed opportunities. At her best, she is at the top of her lungs, filibustering about her everyday gripes and the misbehavior of the people—often men—in her life. This is the Cardi who dominates “Invasion of Privacy”: she’s at the height of success, while remaining disgruntled and aggressively on the defensive. The record is not a giggle but a pissed-off snarl, aimed both at her naysayers and at her romantic interests. “Li’l bitch, I cannot stand you, right hand to Jesus/I might just cut all the tongues out your sneakers,” she threatens, on “Thru Your Phone,” the track that sounds the most like one of her video rants. The song is a gripping torrent of fury and resentment, levelled at a cheating lover—and the other woman—but bolstered by moments of sideways levity.

The swirl of bluster and romantic sorrow on the album shows that love is one terrain that Cardi has yet to conquer. But she is a crafty exploiter of the tabloid gossip surrounding her relationship. Recently, she appeared on “Saturday Night Live,” and used her performance of “Be Careful”—a vulnerable and scornful interpolation of Lauryn Hill’s “Ex-Factor”—to debut her large baby bump. It was a jarring moment for anyone who might have believed that her romance was merely staged to drum up attention. Not since Lana Del Rey has an artist triumphed over such low expectations and landed as a bona-fide pop star.

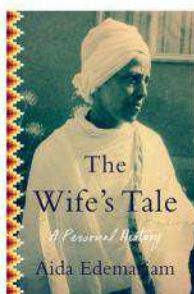
In the past year, there’s been an uptick of people who are using hip-hop as a way to leverage the fame they’ve achieved in other realms. Currently, the industry is trying to make stars out of plenty of other Internet firebrands and meme-generators. There is Danielle Bregoli, a teen-age girl who went viral after a belligerent appearance on “Dr. Phil,” and signed a record deal as Bhad Bhabie. With the support of a handful of well-chosen beats, she makes a disconcertingly catchy trap-rap pastiche. There is also Jake Paul, a dopey blond vlogger and provocateur who recently secured a feature verse from Gucci Mane. The popular hip-hop-podcast host Adam Grandmaison, known as Adam22, is also entering the fray, along with many young Internet-famous video gamers. Cardi could be considered the figurehead of this era of rap as vocation rather than as creative pursuit.

You may get the impression that these artists are grabbing at dollar bills in the wind tunnel of hip-hop. There is something unsettling about this kind of gold rush—it’s propelled by a cynical assumption that hip-hop can be gamed, or that it is the easiest route to notoriety and riches for people who are lacking in quantifiable skills. Some of these artists will rise beyond sheer sensationalism; others will flame out quickly. But Cardi is a shining counterweight. In retaining her dogged openheartedness and honest work ethic, she has been able to prove that hip-hop is the land not of opportunism but of opportunity. ♦

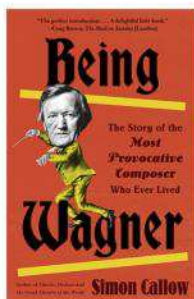
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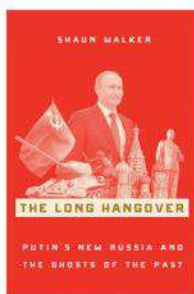
Educated, by Tara Westover (Random House). In this harrowing memoir, Westover, the daughter of survivalist Christian fundamentalists in the Idaho mountains, defies her father and ends up at Cambridge University. Unschooled in childhood, she and her siblings are repeatedly imperilled by their parents’ blistering paranoia about civilization and modern medicine. After she leaves home, revelations include stumbling upon John Stuart Mill’s opinion that, of women’s natures, “nothing final can be known”: “Never had I found such comfort in a void,” she writes. “It seemed to say: whatever you are, you are woman.” Westover is a keen and honest guide to the difficulties of filial love, and to the enchantment of embracing a life of the mind.



The Wife’s Tale, by Aida Edemariam (Harper). Ethiopia during the reign of Haile Selassie bursts to life in this impressionistic family history. Yetemegnu, the author’s grandmother, is married at the age of eight to a powerful priest in the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. Her days soon fill with wifely duties: she bears her first child at fourteen, cooks, hosts holy feasts. Edemariam anchors the book in these mundane rhythms, setting them against a vividly realized landscape. Political turmoil sweeps in like a dream: Yetemegnu is outside among the “pale gold domes of teff” when the Italians invade her village, in 1936; in 1974, when Selassie is deposed, she’s watching the sky for portents. The book elegantly collapses the distance between the vast and the intimate, showing how history reaches even the most sheltered.



Being Wagner, by Simon Callow (Vintage). Callow, who has performed a one-man play about Wagner, assesses the composer’s music in the light of his copious essays, letters, and other writings in this lively biography. He sees Wagner as always “essentially talking to himself,” and the voluminous philosophical speculations as a necessary preparation for the operas. Wagner’s self-absorbed, volcanic personality comes across clearly, whether he is supplying grenades to revolutionaries, seducing his friends’ wives, or sending Nietzsche on “domestic errands.” Seeing himself as an “artist-hero,” he believed that he could save Germany from cultural poverty, and championed nothing less than “a new world order,” without authority, class, or capital—a world he believed only his art could occasion.

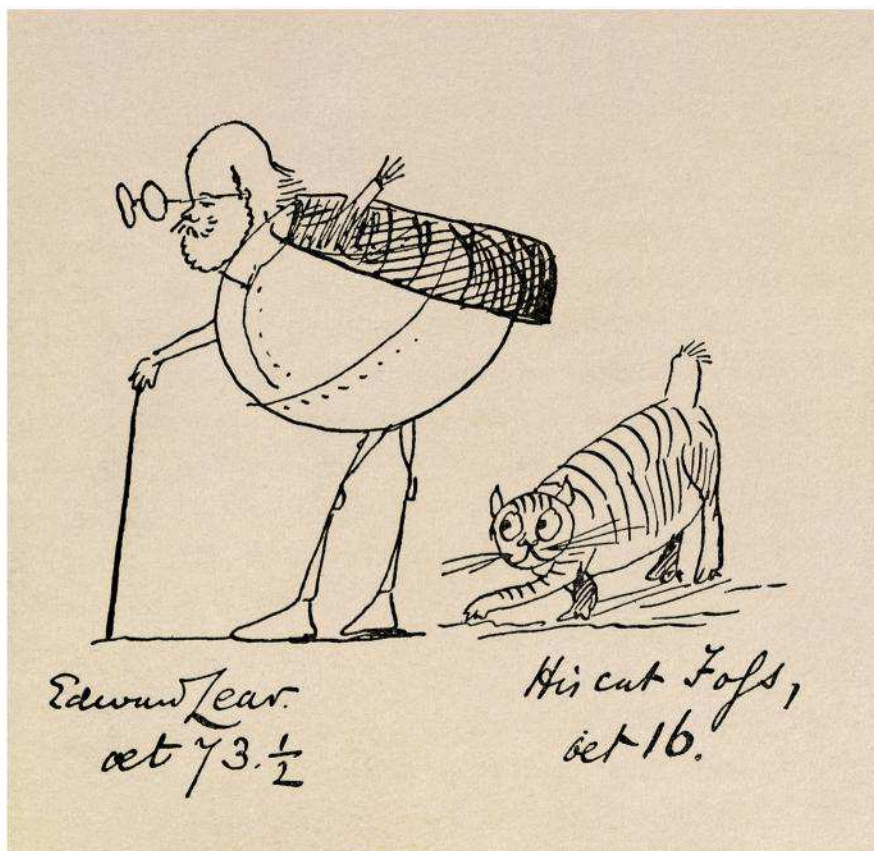


The Long Hangover, by Shaun Walker (Oxford). Underpinning the disparate topics in this account of post-Soviet Russia—the wars in Chechnya, the annexation of Crimea, the residual trauma of the Gulags—is the new country’s attempt to forge a national identity. Walker takes off from the late writer Svetlana Boym’s notion of “restorative nostalgia,” a striving to recover a vaguely defined and idealized past. He argues that Vladimir Putin, seeking a new storyline for a people caught in an existential malaise, has capitalized on the collective memory of sacrifice and victory in the Second World War, the “one event that had the narrative potential to unite the country.”

KNOWING MR. LEAR

The great master of Victorian nonsense and his harrowed soul.

BY ADAM GOPNIK



For much of his life, Edward Lear was best known as a landscape painter.

Cultures, like caterpillars, crawl forward in contradictions, drawing back and then suddenly springing forward. The Victorians, famously puritanical, are also famous for providing the template of modern pornography—the words “Victorian classic” on a paperback have long meant a dirty book—while on the other side of that earnest, progressive Victorian rationality are the mad leaps of Victorian irrationality. All that sense, decorum, and propriety produced the first fully achieved literature of nonsense. Like the porn, it was amazingly generative, so that most works of Dada and Surrealism bear the marks of mid-Victorian Englishness, descending from Lewis Carroll and Edward Lear, as much as modern erotica takes

on those nineteenth-century disguises.

Of the two great makers of nonsense, Carroll rightly has received more attention, because of his twists and quirks, because of his photography and the ghost of pedophilia falsely supposed to cling to his obsessions. About Lear less has been written, perhaps because there does not seem as much to say. His classic love ballad, “The Owl and the Pussycat,” was voted the most popular British childhood poem in 2014, and has been set to music by everyone from Stravinsky to Laurie Anderson. And no history of the limerick, or of light verse, can escape his imposing presence. But his work seems so self-enclosed and self-evident that championing him has felt unnecessary, even impudent. Lear has a certain amount of nursery

nationalism about him; if you read him when you’re a small child, as more Brits seem to than Americans, he becomes, as W. H. Auden wrote, an entire land.

No one would seem better qualified to write a biography of Lear than Jenny Uglow, and now she has, with “Mr. Lear: A Life of Art and Nonsense” (Farrar, Straus & Giroux). Uglow is a matchless popular historian of the British nineteenth century; her 2002 book, “The Lunar Men,” is among the best social histories of British life to have appeared in the past twenty or so years. It’s an account of the intermingling of art and science in the circle around Joseph Priestley and the young Erasmus Darwin at the dawn of the industrial revolution in the Midlands, and the book revealed a kind of mini-Enlightenment centered in Birmingham.

When it comes to Lear, Uglow’s disability, if there is one, is that she is *such* an enthusiast that her enthusiasm crowds out, a little, her urge to explication. That nursery nationalism kicks in. She takes Lear’s greatness for granted, piling on limericks and sketch drawings as though we, too, had known them since infancy. Her enthusiasm can become a velvet rope separating us from her subject, more than an invitation to the dance. (Enthusiasm, whatever they may say, is never actually “contagious.” Eloquence about an enthusiasm alone is.)

What is eloquent and astonishing in Uglow’s biography is her demonstration of how embedded Lear was in Victorian art and culture. Given the eccentricity of his tone and the sad, self-mocking little-Englishness of, for instance, his verse “Self-Portrait of the Laureate of Nonsense”—

He reads, but he cannot speak, Spanish,
He cannot abide ginger-beer:
Ere the days of his pilgrimage vanish,
How pleasant to know Mr. Lear!

—you might have expected a second William Blake, living as a recluse in a row house in Lambeth. Not a bit of it: the younger Lear was a social figure, a permanent house guest, as deep in his time as Truman Capote was in his.

He knew *everyone*. Reading his melodic nonsense lines, one might entertain the thought of Lear as a kind of

comic Tennyson, with the same gift for murmuring sounds disguised as philosophy—and then, reading Uglow, one discovers that Lear and Tennyson were friends, sharing ideas and rhymes. (In fact, Lear set much of Tennyson's verse to his own music.) A diligent student of Charles Darwin might be struck by how much the creatures in Lear's verse—the Pobble Who Has No Toes, et al.—are part of a new vision of life that includes an expanded place for chance and oddity in nature, with the extra idea that animal happiness comes from nothing more than filling a precarious niche for a necessary moment. Then one discovers that Lear was an attentive and informed reader of Darwin; he worked with John Gould, the natural-history entrepreneur who had actually picked apart the varieties of finch that Darwin had brought back from the Galápagos Islands. Lear has Ruskinian notes of dense, worried aestheticism—and then, reading the biography, we get Ruskin weighing in on Lear's lyrics. We find, in Lear, the immersive, overstuffed feel common to all Victoriana—and here is Victoria herself, getting a drawing lesson from him. Because Lear was lodged far more securely in Victorian society than the donnish Carroll was, his art mirrors and parodies it more precisely. Carroll was making jokes about Oxford; Lear about London and the world.

Throughout, Uglow patiently traces the contours of a closeted gay man's life. Lear participated in the classic Victorian pantomime in which an older man supported or befriended or mentored younger ones, often handsome and foreign-born fellow-pilgrims and guides. The pantomime tends to fall into two orders: in one, the relationship was discreetly consummated; in the other, the pathos of yearning and missing feels overwhelming. All of Lear's romances seem, with perhaps one exception, to belong to the second category.

We know Lear best as a befuddled middle-aged man, but he was a prodigy of printmaking, a sort of Victorian David Hockney, with a charming if odd manner that brought him early fame and easy access to the famous. Born in 1812, he rose from an erratically middle-class background

as—it sounds like the beginning of one of his limericks—the twentieth of twenty-one children, by his own account. (Uglow thinks that he might have been the sixteenth of seventeen.) Epileptic, and seemingly what we would now call “on the spectrum,” he became known as an ornithological illustrator when still a teen-ager. Under the indirect influence, and then the firsthand mentoring, of the master John James Audubon himself—they met on one of Audubon's fund-raising trips to Britain—the adolescent Lear had the brilliant idea of publishing a picture book about parrots, just parrots, and nothing but.

If he had published only his “Illustrations of the Family of Psittacidae, or Parrots” (1832), Lear would still occupy a solid paragraph in the history of Victorian art. (A parrot watercolor, rather than a “nonsense” sketch, graces the cover of Uglow's book.) Lear's parrots, for all their exoticism, strike a distinctly English note, and are almost like Regency political cartoons in their airy, bright-colored clarity. In fact, the differences in style between Audubon's and Lear's birds suggest almost perfectly realized national types. Audubon was drawn to the democratic and the encyclopedic—birds of all kinds occupying a common space. Lear's subject was the eccentric individual, poised on its perch. His parrots display plumage, fashion, and intelligence, mixed with aristocratic unself-consciousness. Where Audubon's parrots gyrate and foreshorten themselves—one can almost hear them chattering as they press their beaks toward the picture plane—Lear's are sphinxlike in their mysterious stillness. Audubon fixed a whole nation of birds in action in the wild, even when he had had their corpses wired and posed beforehand. Lear's parrots, drawn from living captives in the newly opened London Zoo, are rich and self-sufficient on their perches. Their minimal movement—a feather astray here, a wing akimbo there—makes them look uncannily like Gainsborough's feathery society beauties, who are equally silent, equally sure.

His animal illustrations made his reputation, if not a lot of money, and on the strength of it Lear began to travel. For the next forty years, he was mostly

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"Of course I love you more than cheese. What a silly question. In fact, cheese and I are just friends. Nothing's going on between cheese and me."

on the road, painting pictures—sometimes in watercolor, sometimes in oil—of exotic places for subscribers at home. Greece, Egypt, Italy, India, Ceylon: for most of his life, Lear was known primarily as an intrepid traveller and landscape painter. The sharply etched nonsense verse (first published under a pseudonym) and hard-edged cartoons that we know best were sidelines to his dreamy watercolors and oils, which occupy a stylistic space somewhere between late Turner and Holman Hunt—a Turner-like love of light effects married to a Pre-Raphaelite conscientiousness about details.

Nothing in the pictures would make you think that the two Edward Lears, picturesque and parodic, were related. If Victorian history were as muddled as that of early Renaissance art, generations of scholars would be puzzling their way through the coexistence of two distinct Lears. Occasionally, in the more exotic reaches of his travels—as in a beautiful view of Ceylon that he painted in the eighteen-seventies—some small note of significant strangeness intrudes, ravishing color and

breeze-blown reeds too intense to quite credit as reportage. But for the most part his work is dutifully, if cosmetically, reportorial, placing him in the line of the great British travellers, like Laurie Lee and Bruce Chatwin. He was always going somewhere.

One of the odd things about Lear's pensive wanderings is how often they tracked the sanctified wanderings of the British Romantic poets. He loved visiting Shelley's and Byron's haunts, Greek shores and Italian lakes, and he patronized the same class of locals, but he did it in a spirit that was self-consciously comical, rather than defiantly adventurous. This immersion inspired his deeper art. By recalling the Romantic voyaging that had preceded him, he could evade the straitlaced Victorianism that surrounded him. If Victorian nonsense was a response to unbending Victorian sense, the forms it borrowed for this mockery were typically Romantic. Carroll takes Wordsworth's imposing poem "Resolution and Independence" as his model for the White Knight's song, from "Through the Looking-Glass," and Lear uses the leg-

endary excursions of Byron and Shelley as models for the wanderings of Dongs and Pobbles.

Even relatively late in Lear's career, he was set alight by memories of the Romantics. Uglow makes the suggestive point that Lear's great ode "The Dong with a Luminous Nose," published in 1876, must have been sparked by his surprising encounter, the previous year, with the Romantic wanderer Edward John Trelawny, the sailor and friend of Byron's, who found Shelley dead and cremated his body on a beach in Italy. (Lear had presumed Trelawny to be as dead as the poet.) "The Dong, like Trelawny, is a Romantic relic roaming high Victorian terrain," Uglow remarks. (One might add that the line about the Dong's "weary eyes on/ That pea-green sail" recalls Trelawny's search for Shelley's foundered boat.)

This residual Romanticism gives surprising pathos and dignity to the Dong's ode. We learn the tale of how the graceful Jumblies once danced to his pipe, and of how one beautiful singer in particular, the Jumbly Girl, was the joy and fascination of his life but then took ship and sailed away. "For day and night he was always there/ By the side of the Jumbly Girl so fair,/ With her sky-blue hands, and her sea-green hair."

In the Dong's world, the dance is over.

And now each night, and all night long,
Over those plains still roams the Dong;
And above the wail of the Chimp and Snipe
You may hear the squeak of his plaintive pipe
While ever he seeks, but seeks in vain
To meet with his Jumbly Girl again;

...

And all who watch at the midnight hour,
From Hall or Terrace, or lofty Tower,
Cry, as they trace the Meteor bright,
Moving along through the dreary night,—
"This is the hour when forth he goes,
The Dong with a luminous Nose!"

It is significant that the luminous nose of the Dong is not biological, like Rudolph's. It is hand-tooled, like a steam-punk machine,

And tied with cords to the back of his head.
—In a hollow rounded space it ended
With a luminous Lamp within suspended,
All fenced about
With a bandage stout
To prevent the wind from blowing it out.

His nose is not his wound but his bow—an up-to-date device, like an iPhone flash-

light, for finding Jumbly Girls in the dark.

Victorian nonsense showed that parody can be a vehicle for the renewal of feeling. The Dong is in one way a mockery of all those other lonely Byronic wanderers. Yet his pathos and his persistence are meant to touch us, and they do. This is not merely mock-Romantic verse; it is, in its own way, very good Romantic verse, comparable to Byron's "So We'll Go No More a-Roving," which must have been one of its inspirations. The Dong, longing for his Jumbly Girl, is certainly a more persuasive, and pensively dignified, image of longing than Tennyson's poet moaning maudlinly for his Maud. Mockery cleanses clichés, and then restores emotion.

Lear was a funny man from early on, entertaining with songs even the family of the Earl of Derby, whose son later served three separate terms as the British Prime Minister. (His residency began after he was commissioned to paint creatures in the Earl's personal zoo.) But Lear didn't publish his "Book of Nonsense" until he was thirty-three, and it was more for the amusement of his friends than as a serious money-making enterprise.

With the book's hard-contoured, deliberately naïve sketches, he found a second manner of drawing that was more potent than his first. Lear, the consummate insider, became his own outsider artist. This was in part a Victorian pattern: Arthur Sullivan wrote cantatas to Longfellow's verse and the airs for "The Mikado." But no one was quite so extreme as Lear when it came to practicing the same art in a completely different mode.

The book worked. He eventually became famous for his limericks—though the term didn't exist until much later—but he disarmed the limerick, so to speak, before he fired it. The classic dirty-joke limerick depends on a twist or turn in the last line. One famous limerick of this kind is attributed to Lear:

There was a young lady of Niger
Who smiled as she rode on a tiger;
They returned from the ride
With the lady inside,
And the smile on the face of the tiger.

But it isn't in his style, and the attribution seems doubtful. Lear's typical

limericks instead always insist on a repetitive last line:

There was an Old Man on a hill,
Who seldom, if ever, stood still;
He ran up and down,
In his Grandmother's gown,
Which adorned that Old Man on a hill.

The joke is always on the dignity of the formal designation. Someone is, insistently, *something*, usually a very particular if not terribly distinguished something—an Old Man on a hill, a young person of Smyrna, an old lady of Chertsey, a man with a beard. (They would have a different effect if they were more glamorous: it's never, in Lear, a young person of Venice, or an old lady of Rome, or a man with a goatee.) Then something bizarre happens to or is made to happen by that person—he is horribly bored by a bee, or she sinks underground, or he runs up and down in his grandmother's gown—and yet there they are, these people, at the end, still of Smyrna or Chertsey or just old. The activity may alter their life but it doesn't alter their designation. Even threats of burning can't change them. A name, once fixed, is fixed for good. Like Trollope's Phineas Finn, the characters have experiences without arcs.

Lear's verse also reflects the naturalist's turn of mind. If Carroll's nonsense satirizes the rise of philosophical idealism and the university, mocking people who think for a living and end up with

absurd results, Lear's is a mockery of Victorian natural science, particularly the life sciences. Taxonomy, naming new species, domesticating the wild—that's the ground of his joking. When Carroll deploys the White Knight or Humpty Dumpty, he is mocking the intellectual's habit of trying to think through things that you can't really think through. ("But I was thinking of a plan/To dye one's whiskers green,/And always use so large a fan/That they could not be seen.") When Lear invents the Pobble Who Has No Toes, he is mocking the naturalist's need to give a name to each new thing. (As with his parrots; Lear gave a new Latin name to at least two.) Carroll is obsessed with un-naming, with showing us how odd names are. ("The name of the song is called 'Haddocks' Eyes.'" "Oh, that's the name of the song, is it?" Alice said, trying to feel interested. 'No, you don't understand,' the Knight said, a little vexed. 'That's what the name is *called*. The name really is, "*The Aged, Aged Man*.'"") Lear is obsessed with the power of naming, with sticking a tag on a thing which gives it a place at, and on, the table.

The nonsense in Lear is suggestive of new sense, more than cracking wise at the old kind. It is not an accident of the language that some of Lear's terms, read today, have erotic-slang overtones: "What a beautiful Pussy"; the Dong. Not that he intended those



"First, we numb you by showing you today's headlines."

overtones. It's our need to fill up space with meaning that makes us rush into verbal voids, supplying words that have not yet been given meaning with meanings that are always seeking new words. (Nonetheless, the use of "dong" to mean "penis"—as in Long Dong Silver, who contributed so much to the politics of the American judiciary—seems to follow Lear's use of it, though a competing case is that it derives from the onomatopoeic "dong" that results when a clapper hits a bell.) Dongs must ring.

For a long time, Lear's amours had to be cloaked in the neat periphrases of "bachelorhood" and eccentric reclusion. Uglow, a circumspect biographer, does discuss his many friendships with women, and some avowals about wanting a wife, but the general outline seems clear enough, and she devotes many forthright pages to Lear's unbearably melancholy love life. He was, in the Victorian manner, of the confirmed-bachelor, not-made-for-women's-comfort kind. "Alack! For Miss Cotton!" he wrote, about a woman whom friends were trying to fix him up with. "And all admirers. But we all know about the beautiful glass jar which was only a white one after all, only there was blue water inside it." A white jar trying to fill it-

self with blue water to "pass"—an image made all the more fetching by the truth that it was often in crossing blue water that a gay Victorian could hope to find happiness. His friend John Addington Symonds—it was for Symonds's two-year-old daughter that Lear wrote "The Owl and the Pussycat"—could write frankly of gay love abroad, "All kinds of young men—peasants on the Riviera, Corsican drivers, Florentine lads . . . used to pluck at the sleeve of my heart." (The fact that a leading voice for male love was contentedly married, with a two-year-old daughter, is also very much part of the classic Victorian picture.)

Abroad, it was possible for men to live more or less openly as homosexuals—if not "out" as lovers, then certainly enjoying the kind of intimate male friendship that was so much a part of Victorian values, the kind that Tennyson had celebrated in his relationship with Arthur Henry Hallam in the most famous of all Victorian poems, "In Memoriam." Lear tried repeatedly to make that kind of lasting connection with a male companion, and seems always to have failed. Frank Lushington, a Cambridge-educated young man who became a successful lawyer, was one of the most intense of these amours. On an 1855 trip to Corfu, which

Lear clearly intended as a courting expedition, Lushington relegated Lear to the friend zone, seeing him only, Uglow says, as "an older, kindly, amusing mentor." It must have been agonizing, and it nearly broke Lear's heart. He found comfort only in painting Corfu in a Turner-esque mode. (At one point, he found there a truly Lear-like scene, of farm animals brought on boats from Albania that were purposefully tipped into the sea to swim ashore: "All the harbour is full of black pigs—swimming away like a shoal of porpoises!")

The one exception to his unfulfilled romantic life seems to have been a connection he made in Rome, around 1840, with a Danish painter named Wilhelm Marstrand, who belonged to a circle of German and Scandinavian artists. Lear burned his diary for that year, but Marstrand's portrait of him in pencil is by far the most sympathetic and sensual image of Lear anyone ever composed: for once he looks not silly but sensitive and handsome, even though, as shy men will, he hides behind glasses and affects newly sprouted facial hair. "Do you know I wear very considerable moustaches now?" he wrote with delight to a friend. Twenty years later, now on his way to bachelorhood, he wrote of the time "*W. Marstrand* & I used to be always together!!"

One striking truth about Lear is how little nonsense writing (and drawing) he actually did. Compared with Carroll's two masterpieces, his long epic poem about the hunting of the Snark, and his massive "Sylvie and Bruno" and "Sylvie and Bruno Concluded," it's a meagre harvest. Lear, as Uglow's book reminds us, was a visual artist in the first and last instance, with the rhymes and jokes the smaller, if longer-lived, portion.

Lear's last years were mostly good, if persistently melancholy, spent largely in Italian villas, with Ruskin himself offering a late critical tribute to his nonsense. His last diary entry was addressed to Frank Lushington, and so was a final letter. His literary afterlife has been happier, and richer. Carroll these days seems mostly to inspire scientists and philosophers; Lear inspires poets. John Ashbery credited Lear as one of his chief influences, and Wallace Stevens's mur-



ANTAGONISTIC BABY PRODUCTS

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muring measures echo him as well: "There was a mystic marriage in Cawtawba, / At noon it was on the mid-day of the year / Between a great captain and the maiden Bawda . . . Each must the other take not for his high, / His puissant front nor for her subtle sound, / The shoo-shoo-shoo of secret cymbals round."

In the middle part of the twentieth century, Lear inspired two remarkable works of literary art. One is Auden's poem to Lear, written around the same time as his dedications to Henry James and Sigmund Freud: "Left by his friend to breakfast alone on the white / Italian shore, his Terrible Demon arose / Over his shoulder; he wept to himself in the night, / A dirty landscape-painter who hated his nose." Lear becomes one of Auden's furtive masters, remaking the imagination through the power of wounded withdrawal.

The other is an extraordinary short story by Donald Barthelme from 1971, called "The Death of Edward Lear." It invents a scenario far from the actual circumstances of Lear's death, which occurred peacefully, at his Italian villa, in 1888. Barthelme turns Lear's death into a parody of Victorian gentility, with Lear organizing the event as something between a picnic and a coronation: "Mr. Lear next offered a short homily on the subject of Friendship. Friendship, he said, is the most golden of the affections. It is also, he said, often the *strongest* of human ties, surviving strains and tempests fatal to less sublime relations." But it's a mordant evocation, too, of the miseries of any old artist on his deathbed: "He then displayed copies of his books, but as everybody had already read them, not more than a polite interest was generated." The story also contains some shrewd commentary on Lear's verse. Barthelme writes, "Then something was understood: that Mr. Lear had been doing what he had always done, and therefore, not doing anything extraordinary. Mr. Lear had transformed the extraordinary into its opposite. He had, in point of fact, created a gentle, genial misunderstanding."

That's true. Lear doesn't find the amazing in the ordinary; he finds the ordinary in the amazing. In Carroll, the other side of the Victorian looking glass shows us a hallucinatory and

satiric version of the normal side. In Lear, everything strange is, to use the word of our decade, "normalized":

Mr. and Mrs. Discobolus
Lived on the top of the wall,
For twenty years, a month and a day,
Till their hair had grown all pearly gray,
And their teeth began to fall.
They never were ill, or at all dejected,
By all admired, and by some respected. . . .

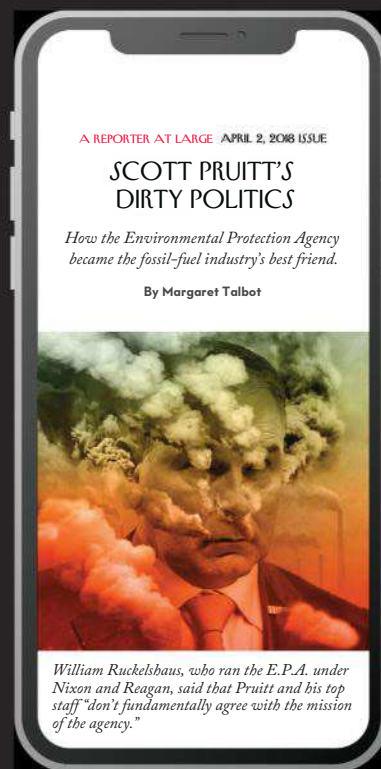
Life on top of the wall for the Discoboli is no different than life anywhere else. Lear's people venture into the mouths of volcanoes and report that they are not hot at all. This gift for creating pathos without sacrificing absurdity is what makes "The Owl and the Pussycat" one of the greatest love poems in the language, of a kind that even Carroll could never write. (When Carroll wanted to be moving, he wrote with a much more conventional Victorian lyricism, as in the prefatory and postscript verses to the Alice books.) In "Jabberwocky," conventional meaning rushes out, and has to be restored by Humpty Dumpty's explanations. In "The Owl and the Pussycat," meanings rush in:

They dined on mince, and slices of quince,
Which they ate with a runcible spoon. . . .

Not even Humpty Dumpty could explain what a runcible spoon is. We know it by its verbal vibration, by its presence, by its sheer runcibleness.

It was a dream poem of a love he had never enjoyed, helped along by a well-wishing community. (" 'Dear Pig, are you willing to sell for one shilling / Your ring?' Said the Piggy, 'I will.' ") This gift for making something felt without having first to make it familiar is one that we later admire in Beckett. Nonsense suggesting sense is a familiar pattern. Nonsense suggesting the numinous is not. G. K. Chesterton once wrote that Lear's rhymes "constitute an entirely new discovery in literature, the discovery that incongruity itself may constitute a harmony," and that if "Lewis Carroll is great in this lyric insanity, Mr. Edward Lear is, to our mind, even greater." Lyric insanity! A menagerie marriage with a pig supplying a ring ends as the perfect image of romance. An affair that should be silly, absurd, and ridiculous resolves into a poem that is touching, poignant, and dignified. It's a modern melody, and Lear its first plaintive piper. ♦

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ON TELEVISION

WHITE-ISH

The meaning of one joke on "Roseanne."

BY EMILY NUSSBAUM



Currently, the reboot nods at complexity without delivering the goods.

In the third episode of “Roseanne,” on ABC, Roseanne Conner and her husband, Dan, wake up on their iconic sofa, in Lanford, Illinois. “It’s eleven o’clock,” Roseanne says. “We slept from ‘Wheel’ to ‘Kimmel.’” Dan replies, “We missed all the shows about black and Asian families.” Roseanne squawks, “They’re just like us!” Then, sardonically, “There, now you’re all caught up.”

It would be so nice to be able to hunker down on my own sofa with “Roseanne,” the blockbuster sitcom from my twenties, a feminist show that was tough about class, with pioneering gay characters and a memorably complex teen girl. It would feel good to critique the new version with a tolerant smile—to say simply that you

shouldn’t judge any sitcom too harshly, early on. In a review of this type, you’d emphasize the gulf between the actress Roseanne Barr, a rich, pro-Trump Twitter troll, and the character Roseanne Conner, a poor, disabled rural grandma who voted for Trump because he talked jobs. You’d point out that neither Roseanne is “Roseanne.” You might praise Ames McNamara, who plays Roseanne’s genderqueer grandson, Mark, or admire John Goodman, a prickly force after twenty years. You could say: lie back and think of Norman Lear.

I can’t write that review, though, and it’s because of zingers like the one above, dog whistles that won’t let you stay *inside* “Roseanne.” Trump comes up only in the pilot, in which Roseanne scraps

with her Jill Stein-voting sister, Jackie (Laurie Metcalf), who wears a “Nasty Woman” T-shirt and yammers like a cartoon “lib.” But, after Trump fades away, his grin lingers.

Take Roseanne’s joke. The jab was clearly aimed at “black-ish” and “Fresh Off the Boat,” comedies that share ABC’s Tuesday schedule with “Roseanne.” The line establishes a few things. One is that the Conners don’t live in the same America as the Johnsons, from “black-ish,” or the Huangs, from “Fresh Off the Boat.” There will never be a crossover episode—no fun clash, say, between an aging Jessica Huang and Roseanne, on a Conner trip to Florida. Instead, the Conners are *themselves* bored, alienated ABC viewers, unable even to remember titles, just that these are the “black and Asian” shows.

If you read the Hollywood trades, you might sense an unsettling frame to *that* joke, too: ABC is owned by Disney, which is seeking to buy Fox, a merger that could be scuttled by Trump, who has a habit of threatening media corporations that cross him. And Trump has opinions about “black-ish.” When the series debuted, in 2014, he tweeted, “How is ABC Television allowed to have a show entitled ‘Blackish’? Can you imagine the furor of a show, ‘Whiteish’! Racism at highest level!” The month before “Roseanne” premiered, ABC pulled an episode of “black-ish”: in it, Dre Johnson tells his baby son a bedtime story about race in America. Buh-leeve me, no punch line appears on ABC without getting O.K.’d all the way to the top.

Of course, Roseanne Conner didn’t make the crude joke that Trump made—so far, at least, the show doesn’t traffic in any heavy clash of perspectives, as in Lear’s shows from the seventies, in which Maude Findlay and George Jefferson held their own against Archie Bunker. No one on “Roseanne” has used the word “racist,” let alone lobbed a slur; instead, the show relies on code, such as when Roseanne snarks that Jackie might want to “take a knee,” even as her black granddaughter, Mary (Jayden Ray), sits nearby, an irony no one remarks on. The missing jokes are the show’s “tell”: when Jackie fights Roseanne, she takes no real shots at Trump, narrowing the debate to jobs and Hillary, as if the two of them were guests

on Hannity. The show's repeated theme is always that Roseanne is not that kind of Trump voter: she's sweet to Mary; she defends Mark against homophobic bullies. You might see this as complexity or as spin. If you're in a darker mood, you might call it propaganda.

So, instead of a straight shot, Roseanne and Dan take a sideways jab at their ABC slot-mates: they're old news. They're *everywhere*—an irritant, a snooze. But Dan couldn't be referring to any other network sitcoms about black and Asian families, because none exist. That's true even on ABC, which just a few years ago was branding itself "the diversity network," sparked by the success of Shonda Rhimes. (And, maybe, by the presence of President Obama.) "Black-ish" is the first black network family sitcom since 2006, when "The Bernie Mac Show" ended its run on Fox. "Fresh Off the Boat" is the first Asian-family show in history, not counting "All-American Girl," in 1994, which ended after one season. They're fragile phenomena. After the success of *Lear* and then of *Bill Cosby*, there were brief, exciting vogues for "ethnic comedy." But, year by year, those shows got gentrified off the comedy block, from NBC to Fox to the WB, UPN, BET. That's how change often works in mass culture: in waves that recede.

The other thing Roseanne doesn't mention is that there are two other ABC sitcoms about families "just like them": "The Middle" (which also airs on Tuesday) and "Speechless." Both shows, like "Roseanne," portray white lower-middle-class couples, weighed down by credit-card debt and living with disabled family members in messy homes they can't afford to fix. "The Middle" is currently limping toward its series finale, but it spent eight seasons delivering a smart, salty portrait of blue-collar life in Indiana. Roseanne and Dan aren't watching "The Middle," however. They don't make a meta-joke about how it was created by two writers who worked on the original "Roseanne." "The Middle" can't exist if "Roseanne" wants to strike that primal chord of white resentment: that more (or any!) black or brown faces mean less room for white people. This useful amnesia is also what enabled ABC to use the slogan "A Family That Looks Like Us" when selling "Rose-

anne" to advertisers, a dog whistle so strong that it might have brought Lassie back from the dead.

Roseanne's crack that "they're just like us!" has a historical context, too. It's an allusion to the bland family sitcoms of the nineteen-eighties, when syrupy, anti-racist "very special episodes" dominated prime-time comedy (think "Family Ties"), treating color blindness as a virtue. In 1988, "Roseanne" helped puncture that formula, and with it the liberal fantasy that bigotry was just a misunderstanding that might be fixed by the credits.

Roseanne's joke makes no sense, though. The ABC Tuesday-night "black and Asian" family sitcoms aren't "they're just like us!" stories: to the contrary, they're downright gonzo in their cultural specificity, spiked with in-jokes. Ironically, these are the shows that most directly carry on the legacy of the original, deeply autobiographical "Roseanne," which was a truth serum in a medium devoted to reassuring lies. Kenya Barris's "black-ish" is just as personal, and, often, as unsettling, a show: it's a raucous series about a class-hopping African-American dad uncomfortable in his bougie family, a story drawn from its creator's life. "Fresh Off the Boat," whose showrunner is the Persian-American Nahnatchka Khan, is a dizzy retro experiment adapted from Eddie Huang's memoir about a hip-hop-obsessed child of Taiwanese immigrant strivers. Both shows mine their best comedy from difference, not sameness: Asian immigrants who take pride in the gulf between them and their neighbors; a black man so anxious about a white neighbor knowing he can't swim that he nearly drowns. On both shows, family love, however relatable, doesn't exist in a political vacuum. As Dre Johnson and Jessica Huang continually warn their children, you can't understand who you are unless you know your history. That probably goes for sitcoms, too.

After the new "Roseanne" debuted, to impressive numbers, Trump—notorious for lying about the ratings of "The Apprentice"—called Barr to congratulate her. But, in "Roseanne"'s case, the ratings were real, which made sense: aside from nostalgia, there's a

powerful appeal to any project that reassures Fox viewers without alienating the MSNBC crowd.

The show offers a clever finger trap for critics. Call a hit dangerous and you imply that it's really quite sexy. And, in fact, the seventh episode, which I won't spoil, pulls a daring switcheroo, one that may offer a new lens through which to interpret Roseanne's behavior. It's not enough. The reboot nods at complexity without delivering—there are good people on many sides, on many sides. If you squint, you might see the show's true hero as Darlene (Sara Gilbert), a broke single mom forced to move in with that charismatic bully Roseanne. But, if that were so, we might understand Darlene's politics, too. We'd more fully feel her pain and also that of her two kids, transplanted to a place they find foreign and unwelcoming.

Instead, Roseanne's cackling drowns these stories out—that's what star power is. In the third episode, Darlene's daughter, Harris (Emma Kenney), hogs the dryer. She has her reasons, we learn: she is so desperate to go back to Chicago that she's dealing shoplifted clothing. But we're encouraged to see her through her grandmother's eyes, as a spoiled urban brat. When Roseanne calls Harris "an entitled little bitch," Harris calls her "a stupid old hillbilly." Then Roseanne tricks her granddaughter into cleaning a plate, and, when she does, Roseanne shoves Harris's head into the sink, hard, then sprays her, saying, "Welcome to the hillbilly day spa."

The crowd goes wild. It's Boomers versus Gen Y—catharsis with a pro-wrestling jolt. (In between conspiracy theories, Roseanne tweeted "watch how I handle her and her very liberal mother!") But would a Chicago teenager call her MAGA grandma a "hillbilly," musty slang from another era? No way: she'd call her a bigot, an asshole, or maybe, if things got heated, a slur with its own nasty history, "white trash." That might make it an uglier confrontation, for sure. But a fair fight is one that reveals the truth. ♦

Headline in the Portola (Calif.) Reporter.

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THE THEATRE

MAGIC WAND

The dark fantasies of "Carousel."

BY HILTON ALS



“**C**arousel,” the 1945 musical by Rodgers and Hammerstein (in revival at the Imperial, under the direction of Jack O’Brien), is a kind of intimate extravaganza, packed with so many ideas about the body, gender roles, premarital coupling, and fear of closeness that at times its force and clumsiness weigh on you like another body, one that’s not necessarily harmful, just a little woozy and didactic, demanding that you get how it “feels.” The two-act spectacle, which runs just under three hours, is about the fantasy of love, and how it gets even hotter when it’s interrupted or shattered by lawlessness or death. When the New York-born

Billy Bigelow (Joshua Henry) arrives in a small town on the New England coast, he brings with him chaos and sex appeal. He’s a beautiful man, with a back as straight as a board, a wide chest, and powerful arms, who is hired as a carousel barker at the town fair. Billy’s boss, the vulgar and mercenary crone Mrs. Mullin (Margaret Colin), couldn’t give two figs for the happiness her joy machine gives to the community: her eyes are on the green, and on Billy. As the apt Colin plays it, we don’t know if Billy’s been sleeping with her or not; what’s clear is that she’s irritated when a local girl named Julie Jordan (Jessie Mueller) finds herself

attracted to Billy, the quintessential “bad boy.” A rock star without a band, Billy likes to play the role of the carouser. He’s detached and footloose. Trying to catch him is like trying to catch a cloud. Julie, when she meets him, is not yet fully an adult and thus doesn’t know what to be afraid of. She’s a post-adolescent creature longing to have the experiences of a woman. It’s summertime, and the sky is as dark and purple as a plum. The stars pulsate like fireflies, and when Julie looks at Billy you can see sparks light up in her body: her attraction is based on his looks and his tough manner, plain and not so simple.

Julie and her friend Carrie Pippert (Lindsay Mendez, a great new star) work at a factory not far from the fairgrounds, and, when they agree to meet Billy away from the carousel, Carrie fears that there’ll be trouble. The friends live in a boarding house attached to the factory, and if they miss curfew they’ll be out of a job. But Julie is willing to sacrifice everything for her guy, who may never truly be her guy. Her ardor becomes even stronger after the First Policeman (Antoine L. Smith) warns her that Billy uses women for money. The factory owner, Mr. Bascombe (William Youmans), offers to give the girls a ride home, but Julie stays behind, knowing that she’ll lose her job for a man who is, at best, uneasy with intimacy.

In 1957, George Balanchine cast the young black dancer Arthur Mitchell in “Agon,” the choreographer’s astounding collaboration with Igor Stravinsky. Mitchell’s partner for one of the pas de deux was a white ballerina, Diana Adams. Writing about the event, the always practical but startling dance critic Edwin Denby noted, “The fact that Miss Adams is white and Mr. Mitchell Negro is neither stressed nor hidden; it adds to the interest.” Their coupling, he noted, was a kind of “novel harmony.” Jack O’Brien’s direction of Henry, who is black, and Mueller, who is white, is similarly strong, especially when it comes to the way the couple communicate their desire: as if it were no big deal, even as you wait for it to be a very big deal. O’Brien does something few white male directors have managed to do, and that is to make his characters’ racial difference integral to the story without al-

The show is packed with ideas about the body, gender, sex, and power dynamics.

lowing it to overwhelm equally important elements, like sex and the power dynamics that kick in for some folks when their motors get jump-started. Color-blind casting in which black actors are dropped into white roles in established theatre works is rarely successful: little thought is given to the characters' history or to the way other characters might react to how different they look. But Henry isn't an anomaly, here to make a statement outside of the text; Billy comes from the less segregated world of New York City, and his racial difference feels plausible. Casting a black performer as the First Policeman as well was a brilliant stroke. The way the First Policeman relates to Billy gives their scenes a new depth: is he an Uncle Tom, currying favor with the white power base he polices the town for, or does he truly despise Billy's shady ways? It may be both, since Billy *is* shady. We never find out much about him or his background, as he dodges being known and, to some degree, cherished, held: to be vulnerable would be death. Julie's lust, focussed and not wanton, invents Billy, just as we all invent our lovers, based on their physical qualities and who we want them to be.

Once Carrie, the First Policeman, and Mr. Bascombe have left, Julie and Billy stand on a tree-lined path near the shore and sing one of the first big numbers in the show, "If I Loved You." It's a perfect duet that cuts between dialogue (Billy: "I don't need you or anyone to help me. I got it figured out for myself") and who the couple imagine they would be if they loved each other. It's a complicated

dream of love bracketed by rejection:

BILLY: If I loved you.
 JULIE: But you don't.
 BILLY: No, I don't.
 But somehow I can see just exactly how I'd be . . .
 (sings) If I loved you.
 Time and again I would try to say
 All I'd want you to know.
 If I loved you,
 Words wouldn't come in an easy way.
 Round in circles I'd go.
 Longin' to tell you but afraid and shy,
 I'd let my golden chances pass me by.

"Carousel" premiered two years after Rodgers and Hammerstein's first collaboration, "Oklahoma!," changed everything by giving America a mood-filled show that it could dance to. (Like "Carousel," "Oklahoma!" relieved America of the burden of being portrayed, generally, as optimistic.) In "Oklahoma!," a farm girl can't understand her feelings for a brutish hired hand who works her family's land. During a dream sequence, she fantasizes that she's been treated roughly by him, and that his world is populated by wicked women—will she be one of them? "Carousel," which Hammerstein adapted from "Liliom," a 1909 stage play by the Hungarian author Ferenc Molnár, elevates these dark undercurrents to the surface. In the second half of the musical, Billy hits Julie—who is now his wife—and Carrie tells her to leave him. Julie refuses; he's her man for good or for ill, mostly ill. Like Stanley Kowalski with Stella, the sexual chemistry is too strong for Julie to give up, and when Billy's wildness leads to the inevitable—or the inevitable for a musical—she prefers to live with the

ghost of his power than do without it altogether.

O'Brien is especially good at teasing out the ways in which women reveal their sexuality in their closed, largely segregated environment. Returning from a trip to New York, where she encountered some showgirls, Carrie talks about how provocative and exciting they were. And though Carrie is supposed to be the opposite of Julie's older and wiser cousin, Nettie Fowler (Renée Fleming), with whom the young couple are living, you get the sense that Nettie has also seen a thing or two. Like Aunt Eller in "Oklahoma!," she is a square-shouldered character; no flies settle on her, not even the young lovers' roiling emotions and hot tempers. Unfortunately, Fleming, the famous soprano, is no actress. The night I saw the show, she could barely control her desire to look out at the audience whenever she talked, let alone sang, as though she were in the middle of a recital. The choreographer, Justin Peck, does a credible job of keeping her and the rest of the cast moving, but occasionally his work seems too expressive for the stage: it makes the space look smaller. I couldn't tell if Henry's tendency to overstate at times—something Mueller avoids; her Julie is all real bone and sinew—had to do with the blocking, or with Peck and O'Brien's wanting to use him in the "right" way. And because Henry himself wants to get it right—he's working toward becoming a true musical star—he can be too precise in his "anger." He has a lot riding on this show, and you can feel his ambition to not only make good but *be* good. And he is. ♦

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THE FINALISTS

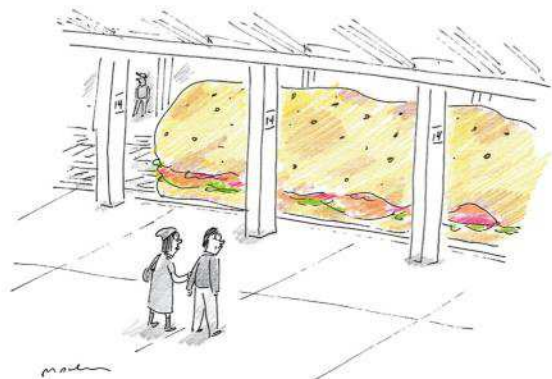


“I told your parents I would convert.”
Catherine Jacobs, New York City

“This is the last time I cover your shift.”
Isabelle Carter, Evanston, Ill.

*“I may not be the hero New York City needs,
but I am the hero it deserves.”*
Scott Campbell, Louisville, Ky.

THE WINNING CAPTION



“We can take this and transfer to the B.L.T. at Forty-second.”
Craig Troyer, Denver, Colo.



Photo by Andrew Harper Editor

Andrew Harper

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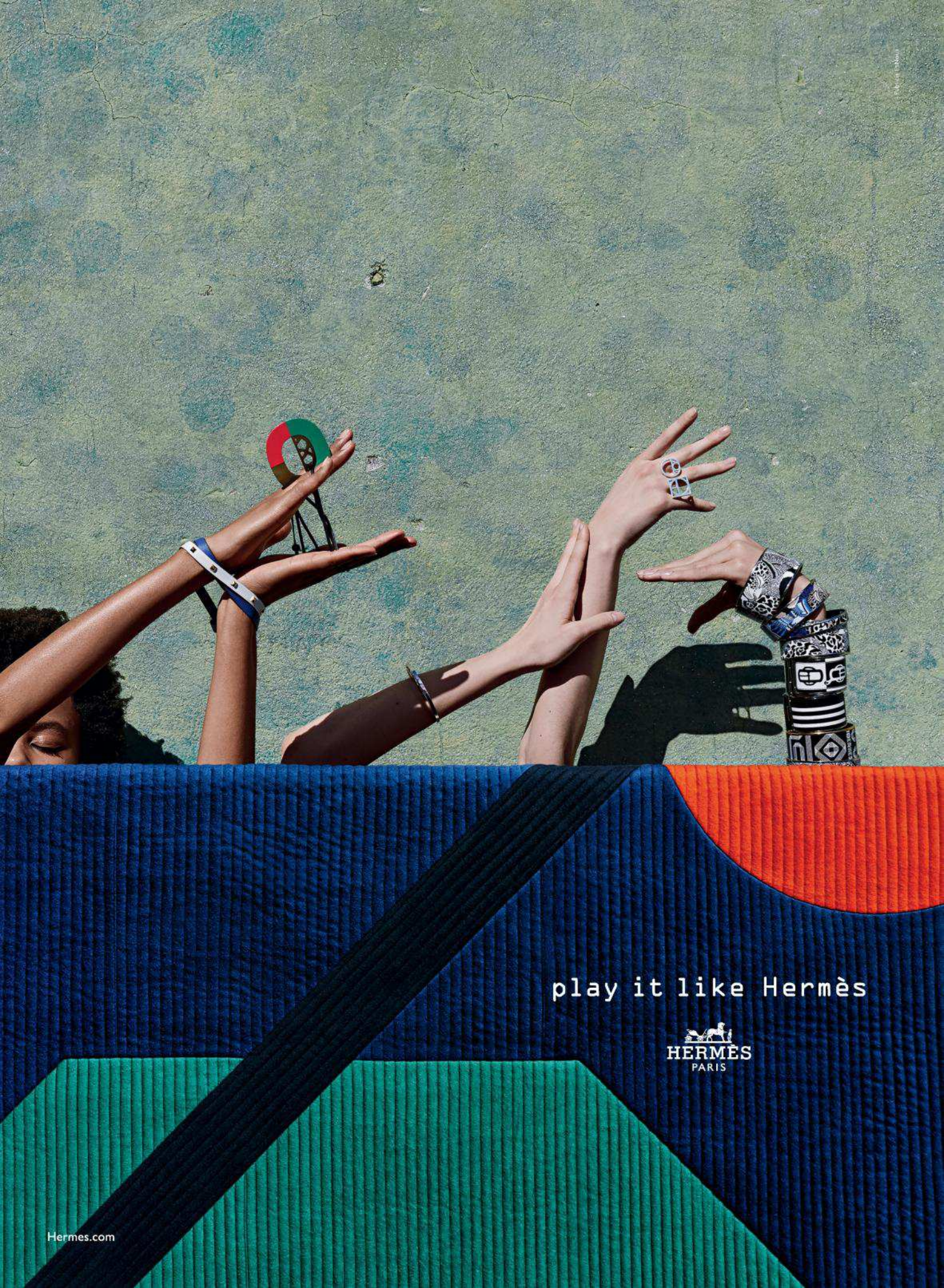
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